

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 11TH JULY, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 11TH JULY, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.32 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable A.A. Maharaj.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 10th July, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's sitting. I also welcome those joining us in the gallery and those watching the live proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking an interest in the National Budget proceedings which is still very much underway.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE 2024-2025 APPROPRIATION BILL 2024

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now resolve into Committee of Supply to resume debate on the Heads in the Budget Estimates.

In Committee:

Head 22 – Ministry of Health and Medical Services

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, before I ask my question to the honourable Minister for Health, I would like to thank the honourable Minister for Home Affairs and Immigration. There was a break-in at the Baulevu High School on Tuesday night in the Science Laboratory. Unfortunately, the police did not appear until 11.30 a.m. When I texted the honourable Minister for Home Affairs, just 25 minutes after talking to him, the police was there. Thank you, honourable Minister, for your prompt response. Just letting you know that spirits and about more than two dozen testubes have been lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- What is the half dozen and two dozen? What is that for?

HON. V. NATH.- More than two dozen testubes from the science laboratory at Baulevu High School and I happen to be the Manager of the school.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I thought you were referring to some bottles or something.

HON. V. NATH.- Testtubes and spirits had gone missing. I want to thank the honourable Minister for Home Affairs for his prompt address.

Coming back to the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services on Head 22, given that any government's priority is infrastructure, education, health and we understand...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Which SEG?

HON. V. NATH.- Head 22. I am talking about the Head; no programme. I have seen that there is a decrease in the overall Head.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- This is the first time that someone is concentrating on the wholesome figure for the Ministry, but I thought we would dive straight into the SEGs and the Activities, et cetera, but you want to begin yours with the overall.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, no just on the Head, there is a huge decrease. If you look at staff establishment, there is a reduction and if you look at the overall budget of the Ministry, it has decreased by 26.382 per cent. Knowing any government, they will want to see the Ministry of Health well looked after. But here, we are seeing a decrease. I request the honourable Minister to explain the decrease. Staff establishment decreased by 10.663 percent travel and communication by 1.130 percent maintenance and operation, purchase of goods and services, special expenditures and capital construction and capital purchase 631.6 percent. That is my only question, honourable Minister. Can you explain these decreases?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will refer your question honourable Nath to the honourable Minister for Finance because that is where they do the cutting of the cloth. When you want your coat to measure to size but it depends on the cloth available.

HON. V. NATH.- I request the honourable Minister to answer.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I understand you want the honourable Minister to answer it, but I will refer your question to the honourable Minister for Finance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think Mr. Chairman, the honourable Member knows what we said during the Budget Debate. Last year we increased the budget for the Ministry of Health from \$339 million to \$453 million. I do not know where he is getting this \$26 million in this year's budget, there is a slight reduction of only \$2 million. It is not a reduction of \$26 million as he has pointed it out, I do not know where he is getting that figure. We have looked at the utilisation in the last year, Sir, in fact, what we have allocated for the Ministry of Health is still a huge increase from what was there before and a slight reduction of \$2 million because of the utilisation particularly in the capital budget. The Health Ministry still gets the biggest increase from last year.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I refer to Programme 1-1(6) and this is with respect to the Grant to NGOs. I see there is a substantial increase from \$900,000 up to \$1.6 million, just a little explanation if I could upon that particular increase?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable Koya for his query with regards to Programme 1-1(6) on the Grant to NGOs. As you would have known, this grant to NGOs in this financial year was allocated to are few NGOs namely Fiji Cancer Society, Empower Pacific, and are few others probably five. For this financial year, we have noted an increase in request for funding through NGOs. What the NGO does is fill in the gaps whereby the Ministry's work is very much needed.

For this year, we are also expecting WOWS Kids Fiji to come on board and also apply to get into this fund. The funding is done through an EOI process. At the moment, we have five NGOs, I can give you the names of the current NGOs in this financial year but for this Budget, we are expecting more NGOs that will want to come on board and have a piece of these funds so that they can assist the Ministry in doing their work.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Programme 1-1(8) – Upgrade and Enhancement of Labasa Hospital (Interior) - \$5.1 million. From the \$5 million allocated for the upgrade of Labasa Hospital, less than a million dollar was used, that is, 16 percent of the budget. According to the information which is posted on the Parliament website, can the honourable Minister explain why?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, in terms of the utilisation in Labasa Hospital, what the contractors faced was the electrical issues. Because of the electricity capacity within Labasa Hospital, most of the capital projects in terms of the refurbishment of the A&E was put on hold. We currently have new machines in the Labasa Hospital such as CT Scan and laboratory equipment but due to the capacity of the electrical supply within Labasa Hospital, that cannot cater for the load of the new equipment. Together with that, the old wirings, that is why we brought EFL on board to do a whole survey of the hospital and give us a report. We should privatise the electrical work before they can commence with the completion of the work; that was the hold up in Labasa Hospital.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, on Head 22-1-1(5) – Outsourcing of Emergency Clinical Health Services, I noticed there was a reduction of \$1 million from the last financial year. Seek clarification from the honourable Minister.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, for the outsourcing part, there is a reduction but because we are also improving our capacity within the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, we have improved our testing capabilities and other specialised areas. That is why there is a reduction, but we have used that as a backup should the need arise then we will fund. Should we exhaust this allocation, there is always an opportunity to source from within to ask for more.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, in fact I have two questions. One is on Programme 1-1(5) and the other one is on Programme 1-1(6). Shall I just do both questions as one, Sir?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Programme 1-1(5) – Doctors Specialisation (\$650,000). I just need clarification whether this is to do with further capacity development in order for our doctors to specialise in certain areas or where we lack such skills, we bring in the specialists?

My other question is on the Sai Prema Foundation which is on SEG 6. I know that they were also given the same allocation, we appreciate the work that they are doing, particularly for our

children, not only Fijians, but from the region as well. My question to the honourable Minister is, whether this will be an annual allocation or this is just temporary?

I know initially when Sai Prema Foundation Fiji was in the infancy stages, there were discussions about what they provide and what comes from the Government. Like I said, we appreciate the work that they are doing, but I have seen this allocation in both last year's budget and this year's, so I just wanted to know whether this will continue in the years to come or there will be some variations?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, for his first question on doctors specialisation, that allocation is for course fee payment of our medical officers pursuing Masters of Medicine Programme and Public Health through in-service training. That is that allocation for. It will be used to pay for the course fee for Semester 2, 2024, and the balance will be used to pay for the continuing students in 2025. Again, as always, an EOI will be called for the utilised space for those who are graduating at the end of the year.

Mr. Chairman, as for the second question in terms of Sai Prema Foundation Fiji, this grant started last year. Yes, as alluded to by your good-self that they are doing a good work in terms of correcting congenital heart defects and also very much needed screening for our rheumatic heart disease patients. This allocation, as we speak, is to assist with the operational cost, as they are bringing in experienced doctors from overseas to perform this lifesaving surgery at free of charge here.

At the moment, it is not only localised to Fiji, but also including other Pacific countries. In terms of answering your question, will it be a yearly thing, we are taking it early, it started last year and this year, it is divided into four disbursements. Based on their acquittals, then we will give them their balance so that has been the practice from last year and this year. Next year, Mr. Chairman, I do not know if it will still continue. Nevertheless, they are doing a good work in addressing some of the gaps within the Ministry in terms of the specialised area of correcting congenital cardiac defects.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will begin from the back again.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, it has already been asked by honourable Kumar.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Chairman, firstly, I just would like to thank the honourable Minister for the big job done at the Savusavu Hospital, all the refurbishment works, maintenance and repairs that have been going for the past few years. I am getting the feedback from the people of Savusavu that they really appreciate the Government's effort in trying to fix the Savusavu Hospital. From the books that I have here with me from last year, you were given \$250,000 for refurbishment work and again for this year, we have another \$200,000 for the same purpose (refurbishment) in SEG 8. It is coming back this year on this Budget for another \$200,000 for the refurbishment work at Savusavu. I just need a bit of clarification on the kind of work. Is that to complete the same kind of work that you are doing, or are there some other new refurbishment works and repairs et cetera coming up?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I thank honourable Tuinaceva for his query on the refurbishment of Savusavu Hospital of \$200,000. He is correct in saying that that has been an ongoing allocation from previous year's budget up until now, it is to do with a good amount of capital works within Savusavu Hospital as you are all aware of in terms of the surrounding and the landscape. There was some degree of landslide there so for this allocation, it is an ongoing one and supposedly to be for the Divisional Engineer Western, for sewer line re-alignment which was approved by the Ministry of Finance, contract documents were signed with the Ministry of Public

Works and again we are waiting the new financial year to transfer funds to the Divisional Engineer Northern to confirm the commencement of work.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr, Chairman, let us go to Levuka from Savusavu. The Levuka Hospital was destroyed by fire and I do not see any allocation for the construction of the hospital that was destroyed by fire unless it is in SEG 8 on the Upgrade and Enhancement of Sub-Divisional Hospitals but it is not mentioned, just a clarification on that, Mr. Chairman.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, with regards to Levuka Hospital after a part of the old hospital was damaged by the fire together with the infrastructure that was housing the mortuary. The area where the old hospital which was damaged, that was condemned, that was one-third of the hospital. The other two-thirds, when I visited last year and this year, I was told that the base of the hospital is still intact and they are able to, if we can maintain it then it will be for good use but in terms of the infrastructure which was housing the mortuary and that area of the old hospital which was condemned, as we speak, we have some donors who stand readily available to assist the Government in improving that part of the infrastructure. If you prioritize it, it is way low down because that part of the old hospital, the better half of the two-thirds of it, that is currently being housing our Environment Health Officers while the mortuary part, we will have to deal with it and see how we can build the infrastructure and put in the new mortuary.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just to clarify that further, it is included in SEG 8. It is not mentioned but it is part of it.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, supplementary. So if it is included, then the mortuary works is also included in that?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Included.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, maybe we seek your direction, if we have more than one question, do we go one by one or do we ask all the questions at once on the same Activity?

MR. CHAIRMAN. - I think we go one by one to allow the Minister to respond to it. Otherwise, it will be like yesterday.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Yes, I noticed that.

Mr. Chairman, we noted the 0.4 percent decrease with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' budget. I also noted in the new budget book the items that were missing which we seek clarification from the honourable Minister for Finance whether it has moved to other Activities or Programmes. One is the Laundry Service, there was \$1.3 million allocated in last year's fiscal year, it is missing from this year and the Customer Relation Support (DFAT) - \$84 million and the Community Health Worker Wages amounting to \$3 million. It was in last year's allocation under this Programme but is missing from this year's Budget book. I just seek clarification whether it has moved to another Programme.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, it has been decentralised to all the different cost-centres activities. So, if you look at all the other Programmes and Activities, you will find that we have moved to these cost-centres which is a better way of allocating so that expenditure is utilised in time and fully.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Thank you for that answer but I am not satisfied. I have gone through all the SEGs centres and it is not there, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I will let the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services answer and then I will come back to you.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, start of with your Community Health Worker, you asked that question? I think it is in SEG 7, an amount of \$3 million.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is on SEG 8 – Upgrade and Enhancement - Sub-Divisional Hospitals, Health Centres and Nursing Stations. I can see that \$2.4 million is allocated this year. Last year the money was allocated, only 53 percent, that is around \$1.2 million. Again, if the honourable Minister can explain to us why the funds given last year was not fully utilised and why do you need another \$2.4 million?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I thank honourable Premila Kumar for her question. That is SEG 8 on the first one, upgrade...

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is on Upgrade and Enhancement - Sub-Divisional Hospitals, Health Centres and Nursing Stations

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- We are requesting \$500,000 for seed funding. We are doing seed funding for this financial year so in the upcoming financial year, we are able to execute the work. Seed funding preparatory works, we are doing it for newly established nursing stations, upgrading nursing stations to health centres that is part of the seed fund.

We have gone around Viti Levu in terms of looking at our health facilities and areas where population have increased or areas which the road has reached up to. We have identified that this facility needs to be upgraded to the health centre level. For that to happen, there needs to be a doctor looking after the health centre, so the quarters, improving the storage space et cetera. We need seed funding for that to do our preparatory works before we can finalise everything and put a monetary value on it.

Another issue on is \$50,000 on Incinerator Rehabilitation, Building Infrastructure, that is, for Sigatoka and Rakiraki only. The Extension of the Waiting Area at the Kamikamica Health Centre in Lautoka, again one of the issues is the electrical works for our facilities and this one is specifically for Nadi Hospital in the amount of \$430,000.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- A supplementary question, Mr. Chairman, Sir. My question will be in two parts. Sir, you were also given some funds last year, substantial amount and only 53 percent was used. Can you explain why you were not able to use the rest of the funds?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- As you are aware, this financial year we were given an allocation for these works. Together with that, we had assistance from our development partners and other multi-lateral agencies like UNICEF. That is why there are some savings within those allocations, but nevertheless in areas where we were unable to spend was external to our control, like the capacity within the Ministry of Works and so forth which limited our ability to spend. Those are two of the main reasons I can think of.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman through you to the honourable Minister, we do appreciate the assistance by our bilateral partners. I note that you are still receiving funds for Anti-COVID activities, in last years' budget we also had assistance from Indonesia. This is under Programme 1-1(7) and that is not appearing, but we still have the China - Pacific Island Countries Anti-COVID Cooperation Fund. Again, the question honourable Minister is, where is this fund

particularly focusing, whether it is the FCDC laboratory and on the continuation of it as well, because I am also aware that we are in Geneva, the team is in the process of developing the pandemic laws, so what is the purpose of this assistance and where is its focus on?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, I believe the question was in two parts; the assistance from Indonesia (China Aid on COVID). The assistance from the Indonesian Government, which was a grant, that has been fully utilised, that is why it is not here. Probably last month we had completed the handing over of very much needed equipment by the Government of Indonesia to Fiji. I think that was the spillover from the previous government.

In terms of the funding by the Government of China, the COVID fund, the handover was done last year, and it was reflected in our allocation last year but we did not utilise it and again it is reflected this year that it is still there. We have some plans on how we can utilise the fund both in evaluation of our health system and also for the purpose it was used for – Incident Management Response Team (IMRT). They will come up with their own process on how to utilise fund for programmes which better prepare us for certain and future pandemics so far.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Well, that is just about all, we will move on to Programme 2. We have been dwelling on this one for the last 40 minutes or something.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is not clear, there are certain things which are still not clear.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Can we move on, you had two rounds each, you were being given time to raise your questions and queries.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is budget, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, I understand it is budget, but we need to ensure that we prepare ourselves well otherwise it will be continuing like this and then it will eat up the whole of the morning. Time is of the essence here, honourable Members. When you come, please prepare well, you put your questions in a row so at least it helps everyone.

(Honourable Member interjects)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You want another, that is your third time, honourable Koya.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We cannot hear clearly what Programme, what Activity, what SEG and what you are asking. It is not very clear.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are still on Programme 1-1 and we have been dwelling on this for the last 40 minutes.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, it is quite a pertinent question that is why I am asking and I was actually only asking one at a time. This is to do with Programme 1-1(5) – Clinical Services and Governance. The allocation has been reduced by some \$50,000 and the word “Governance” has been added to it. From what I understand, governance would mean that this is relative to patient’s safety and quality care, et cetera. Because we have added the word “governance”, can you explain why there is a reduction? From what I understand is to do with infection control, et cetera in hospitals. Why would there be a reduction and addition to the actual clinical services line but a reduction in the budget? Just an explanation on that honourable Minister.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, there is a reduction of \$50,000, you are correct in saying that in terms of Clinical Services and Governance, it is to do with safety and safety is paramount in terms of health. The budget item is for the payment of Outreach Programmes relating to blood services. With that being said, there is even a reduction in \$50,000, you will note that in the other Programmes and Activities there is an increase in the Outreach Programmes for the various Divisional Hospitals.

Again, it is all to do with the Ministry in trying to decentralise most of its services. Clinical Services and Governance, when we had the signing with DFAT on the Master Plan, we also give Certificates to our staff (our nurses) who just graduated on doing clinical governance work within the Central Division. That will be replicated in the other main hospitals and the other divisions as well. In terms of costing, decentralising certain priorities to the Divisional and Labasa Hospital is the other hospital under the Ministry is where we will find those funds that has been put aside to those areas.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, a supplementary question. Are we sufficiently covered for infection control in hospitals within that particular budget?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Sir, for now yes because we continuously have the assistance of our development partners mainly DFAT on this area.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I could just make a general comment to help the honourable Members on the other side. As I said last year we increased the Ministry of Health's budget very, very significantly. This year, the reduction is just \$2 million and you will see the reductions of \$20,000 or \$30,000 and \$50,000 in some of these areas. It does indicate utilisation of our budget. So, we have looked at the utilisation and reduced on the basis of that so it does not mean that the services will be affected.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There is another question raised by honourable Premila Kumar that the reduction is \$26 million.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, in the last financial year it was \$453 million, this is \$451 million.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You get that?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I do not know where they are getting \$26 million from?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, let me explain, honourable Minister for Finance. If you look at Page 152, you will find in brackets, that indicates that there is a reduction. It says \$26 million as the total. I am asking him and he is misleading Parliament. He says only \$2 million, whereas the book says it is \$26 million.

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Go to page 150.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- So you are talking about Programme 1?

HON. E.Y. IMMANUEL.- Yes, that is for Programme 1.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- First he talked about the total budget, and he said he was reading Programme 1-2. What I said very clearly, and I have repeated myself, the total budget for the Ministry of Health and Medical Services last year was increased significantly. In the last financial year, it was \$353 million, and this year it is \$351 million, it is a reduction of total budget by \$2 million. Then you have Programme and Activities where the movements are increased or decreased, but the overall budget has just decreased by \$2 million.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Nath, the honourable Minister wants to reply to your query.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, honourable Nath, you were correct in saying a reduction by \$26 million. If you look at the Established Staff (\$10 million), it is nearly half of that. That has been decentralised to the various Divisional Hospitals cost centres.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 8 on the Construction of New Tamavua Rehabilitation Hospital (\$400,000). In the last Financial Year 2023-2024, \$1.5 million was given and the utilisation was zero percent. They did not use the money. Can I ask the honourable Minister, you could not use that \$1.5 million given last year, this \$400,000 is for what?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, the last allocation for this Financial Year for rehabilitation of the hospital was \$1.5 million. Our ability to spend, again, it is beyond our control externally. In terms of the development partners, who is looking into this? Discussions are ongoing, but nevertheless, for this upcoming financial year we will start with the preparatory works on our end. Once that is done then KOICA can come on board and start building of the new Rehabilitation Centre. It is a four-year programme before the completion of the Rehabilitation Centre.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question will be on SEG 9 but before that, I just wanted to make a remark on the unspent money on construction of new Tamavua Rehabilitation Hospital. I can understand the honourable Minister's frustration, he wants to do the work, but the work is stuck in the pipeline all because of Public Works Department and that needs to move. If the money is not spent, it simply means the service is not delivered to the people.

Now, my question on SEG 9 is to do with the Purchasing of Specialised Medical Equipment for Urban Hospital as well as for Sub-Divisional Hospital, Health Centres and Nursing Stations. Specialised Medical Equipment is so important for diagnostics. The funds were given last year but, unfortunately, it was not fully utilised. The utilisation rate was extremely low. So, if the honourable Minister can explain why the funds were not used.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in terms of the utilisation, again, it is nothing new. It has been there from the previous government until now. It has to do with the procurement process - tendering and the process itself. It is an issue whereby there are delays in equipment coming over but, nevertheless, the Ministry through the Fiji Pharmaceutical & Biomedical Services (FPBS) are working on how they can expedite the process in bringing equipment over.

Nevertheless, there are equipment already in Fiji at the moment. Some have been installed but others are waiting for, again, improvement in the infrastructure.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I just want to thank the honourable Minister for his very honest answers.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, forgive me from my ignorant with the Community Health Worker allocation. My question to the honourable Minister is, does this only include the 1,200 villages or will it also include some heavily populated settlements?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, those Community Health Workers have been registered not only in *itaukei* villages but in settlements as well. If they are registered, they have gone through the training, they registered within the Ministry, they should be receiving their allowance prior to submitting their report.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, thank you for allowing me the opportunity. I asked for an opportunity to make a general comment because it will help all of us, particularly the Ministers and the Ministries.

In our Budget discussion with the Permanent Secretary for Finance and his team, we asked the question about the slow implementation and the problems in the procurement process. The feedback from the Permanent Secretary, Sir, is that one of the key problems that they see in Ministries is junior officers are involved in the preparation of the documents for the procurement process. As a result, it goes to and fro, and the exchanges are taking time.

I think, Sir, in terms of moving forward because we want implementation to be done because of the funding, if Permanent Secretaries can be tasked to ensure that senior officials from Ministries are involved in the process because of the tender boards. I had raised an issue where previously, we used to have agency Tender Boards, Divisional Tender Boards but all these has been centralised now for control purposes, particularly for those that are on 'R'...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- By your government.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ...and it has not changed, honourable Minister. A lot of things are still on 'R'.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We have changed that.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- But the way forward is to get the right officers to do the work so that it can help in terms of expediting the process. I just want to make that comment, Sir, because it will help us in terms of the way forward. Thank you, Sir.

MR CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Leader of the Opposition for your comment. We will now move forward.

Programme 2-2?

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, Programme 2-2(5) - Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control (\$350,000). Just a question to the Honourable Minister, we have the same allocation that was given last year coming again this year and basing on the record that we have, there is about 80 percent death every year due to NCD related diseases and sickness. So, is this allocation enough to fight against NCDs and the death rate that we are facing in this country in relation to NCDs?

HON. DR. RATU. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, thank honourable Tuinaceva for your question. These two new core Centres - Wellness in Activity 2 and Family Health in Activity 1, by way of background, they get a lot of funding not only from development partners but multilateral agencies as well, UNICEF, so it is through this funding that they able to do most of

their programmes. That is why their utilisation rate is a bit slow, not less, simply because of the funding and assistance that comes to them. That is why most of these allocations are at the same level. Nevertheless, it is sufficient for now.

HON. N.T.TUINACEVA.- Thank you, Sir.

MR CHAIRMAN.-We will move on. Programme 2-3?

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Just a clarification from the honourable Minister, through you Mr. Chairman, the reduction of Oral Health Promotion and Mental Health Awareness by \$100,000. Just a clarification, I believe Oral Health Promotion used to be \$300,000. Why was the reduction in view of the prevalence of dental decay in our society?

HON. DR. RATU. A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you, I thank honourable Ravunawa for his question. In terms of the reduction, again, for now, the amount is sufficient. For this year, we have just appointed our National Advisor on Oral Health and for this financial year, he will be doing most of the programmes for which the coming financial year, they will be able to carry out their activities. Nevertheless, with that reduction, we still have funding within the Divisions, within the two main Hospitals to carry out their outreach and also implement some of the programmes that are usually funded within this allocation.

In terms of the reduction, there are allocations available at the Divisional and the two main Hospitals.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Thank you, honourable Minister.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG 5 - Climate Change and Health Care (\$65,000). Can the honourable Minister explain to us what activities will be carried out with this money?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- The Programme looks after public health complaints or new environmental issues, such as public health nuisance that is perceived by the public to be harmful for human health. Environmental Health Inspectors will investigate, advise and prosecute. This programme budget will look at assessment and monitoring of recreational water, procurement of point of care testing kits and re-agents, as well as assist on climate change and health interventions, training and community work.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Koya, you signalling something. We have gone past that, Sir, maybe you can raise it in other activities still ahead?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- No, Sir, it was relative to an increase that I had asked for. I had sent the slip across earlier, and they had it. It was to do with the mental health awareness issue, Sir, in Programme 2-2.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We are now into Programme 3 Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I had sent it earlier, it was with them, Sir, before we actually came up.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have to take it from here, Sir. We are now into Programme 3.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I have a question with respect to Programme 3-5(5). Just seek clarification, Sir, from what I understand, from St. Giles, their budget usage has been in excess of

100 percent. I think it is about 140 percent. There is a reduction (correct me, if am wrong Sir) and I think it is an important issue. Mental health is also an important issue with respect to St. Giles. Are they not being resourced correctly in terms of rations, et cetera. In SEG 5, there is a reduction. Again, correct me if I am wrong, I just want an explanation on that.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- On ration?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- So, \$200,000, a reduction in \$10,000, and that is for procurement of ration. As with this facility – St. Giles Hospital, on ration, that allocation is ration for inpatients. In terms of the reduction, this is one area also where they get a lot of assistance from the private sector. For now, the funding is sufficient, even with the reduction of \$10,000. So, should we need more, we can also source from within, but as it is, it is sufficient.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I had really asked because I know because of the drug issue, we have had a huge amount of intake and St. Giles itself is actually using up a whole lot more than the budget that is actually given. Fair enough, if you have private entities supporting the St. Giles institute, anyway, I think that fairly answers it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on to Programme 4-1?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, on Programme 4-1(5) - Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD) Control Programme, I note that we have only \$50,000 allocation, particularly in the build-up areas in the Central Division. Maybe, the honourable Minister for Finance Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics can help as well - the linkage between the Ministry of Local Government in terms of the LTDD Campaign. Maybe a chance to increase this allocation, Sir, based on previous issues that we have had in as far as LTDD is concerned.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his question. In terms of this allocation under LTDD Control Programme, this is for their ongoing programmes. Should there be any outbreak, funding is available within Headquarters on Emergency funding. They can source from within Headquarters. But for this allocation, it is specifically for their programmes on preventative and awareness. Now, they are doing it on a daily basis.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, still on SEG 5 - Boats and Outboard Motors, \$50,000 has been allocated in other programme as well. What we were told in one of our meetings that there are areas where the Ministry gave boats, the Boats are there but engine is not there. In some places, engine is there but boat is not there. It is really a problem, especially for people in maritime areas. I can see the allocation of \$50,000, is it to buy new boats or also to provide engines which has been missing?

HON. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in response to honourable Bala, this is the allocation for purchase of new vessels, minor maintenance and life jacket - item which is required by MSAF, repair, maintenance and servicing of outboard motors and buying of the new outboard motors as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 5-1?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Programme 5-1(5) – Service Fees – Biomedical Equipment (\$1,600,000). If the honourable Minister can explain in terms of what does it entail, I mean, when you say service fee?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- When we get new equipment, there is a provision there for procurement and servicing, so that is the service fee. We make sure that there is a clause of service fee within the contract so should anything happen to the machine here, the suppliers are contracted to come and do the servicing, and at the same time, build capacity within our local biomedical cadre within the Ministry. That is the allocation.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. – The reason why I asked that question, when you buy a new equipment, et cetera, there is always a guarantee period.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I agree.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So it is only when the guarantee period expires, then only you have to pay for that fee.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

(Hon. Prof. B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, it is, and I am not asking you the question, honourable Minister for Finance. Let the honourable Minister answer, he is answering questions much better than you. Thank you.

Honourable Minister, the \$1.6 million that is allocated, is that money going out to the foreign companies, or is it to the local institutions?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, some are going to the foreign companies and some to the local institutions.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Are you saying that we have the expertise?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, we have some expertise available in the private sector within Fiji, and even our own biomedical cadre. In terms of the finer details of the very expensive machines, we still need to get overseas experts to come in and do the servicing.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- What about the spare part issues ? Normally, we hear that the spare parts are not here when it comes to servicing, et cetera, and the machines are not operatable, and they have to wait for a longer period. Do you have the sources internally?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- It is mostly overseas.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, what do you do in that period when the machines are not serviced? I mean, these are practical issues that people are facing, and it is not a laughing matter, thank you.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- I agree. So, I will give you a scenario. If a machine is found to be faulty and that is the only machine available in Fiji in the public sector, then we have no other choice but to source servicing and spare parts et cetera. That is why we have allocation for outsourcing so that we are able to use the private sector to send our patients to, in the

meantime, while we do the repairs on our equipment. Once that is done, we revert our patients back to public servicing.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for your very detailed explanation because this is what people want to hear, and my questions were precisely from that point of view.

My other question is on SEG 9 - Bio-Medical Equipment for Urban and Sub-Divisional Hospitals (\$10,000,000). If I am not mistaken, \$12 million was allocated in the last Budget, and it was not fully utilised. This year \$10 million is allocated. If you can explain why that money was not used?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, again, it goes back to the tendering and procurement process. In some procurement, they expect partial payment or full payment. With that being said, then the tendering plus the procurement from our suppliers overseas is where most of the delays are. Nevertheless, especially in this programme, usually the funds are committed so that we do get in the equipment, perishable or medicine. Once we commit the allocation, it is reflected in the budget. Only until we receive the items, then we do the full payment. It may be reflected in the next financial year.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Minister for your response – much appreciated.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 5-1(9) Dental Equipment for Urban and Sub-Divisional Hospitals (\$800,000). I noticed that there was a reduction in this allocation. Sir, a clarification from the honourable Minister, the dental service would need a boost in their allocation. I would particularly talk about the prosthetic service that is now being held at Nakasi Health Centre. It needs to come back to the CWM Hospital.

Also, the expansion of the dental prosthetic service to Vunidawa. Now, they have an appointed officer in Nadi when they need to set up the dental laboratory there. Also, we want to expand that service to Savusavu and probably to Taveuni as well. These are specialised dental care where we fabricate dentures for our elderly patients, and they cannot travel too far to get this service. I would urge the honourable Minister to, please, consider our elderly citizens in the decentralisation of service from the main centre and closer to their home. So, I am particularly concerned, and I seek clarification on SEG 9.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, I thank honourable Ravunawa for his concerns and points. Yes, I sincerely agree in terms of the Prosthetic Services that is done in Nakasi. It used to be in CWM Hospital. We do intend to bring it back, but the issue is space within the CWM Dental Services. Should we allocate adequate space, then we should be bringing it back. Yes, it is a priority within the Ministry to decentralise Prosthetic Services to the Sub-Divisional levels.

I have been to Savusavu Hospital, the Dental Office there do agree with me that, yes, there needs to be Prosthetic Services done there, Taveuni, Vunidawa and other affected Sub-Divisional Hospitals. But to be honest, the dental cadre together with its area of work since taking this office is found to be badly affected. I can say poorly supported, and it is something that the Government, through the Ministry, is trying its best to improve the workspace and infrastructure. This allocation we have here will buy more dental chairs to fit those that are in poor walking conditions. I can say for Rakiraki Hospital and other areas as well.

For this financial year, we have approved in buying new dental chairs for certain facilities, but this is just a continuation on that and for sure, we will improve and decentralise some of the services to the Subdivisional areas.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, this is relative to SEG 5 - Consumables. Patients have actually complained with respect to the consumables they have been asked to purchase themselves and I am not sure, but I think some of the doctors also. I see there is \$33 million that has been allocated for consumables and medicine and that has not changed from last year. Why is there a disconnect with respect to what has been told in the space? Do we need more with respect to that particular area about consumables and medicine? Is that sufficient to cater for consumables and medicine? Why I am asking this is in light of the fact that there are patients who been asked to bring their own medicines, et cetera. In some places, there was a shortage of even cotton wool.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Chairman, through you, to answer the query raised by honourable Koya, yes, this allocation increased by \$3 million from this financial year and it is still the same.

The issue of shortage of medicine and consumables, I can say is something that is felt within the region because of our location, purchasing power, et cetera.

Nevertheless, we rely on our improved procurement system within FPBS which has just gone online. Together with that, we are trying to improve our processes on how we can streamline the approvals from the Tender Board and the availability of what we need from the suppliers. Most of the time, it is what we need that they do not send and what we do not need, they do send. So, that is something the Ministry through FPBS is working on trying to improve the processes.

As we speak, honourable Koya, I can say that for now, this is sufficient. We do plead with our public to bear with us that, yes, at times, there will be shortage of certain things but, nevertheless, as a Ministry, we are always trying to improve and see that we have much the needed medicine and consumables readily available here in Fiji. It also goes back to our storage capacity as well.

Just recently, we opened a new storage facility in addition to the current one in Jerusalem Road and, likewise, we will be commissioning another new facility in Labasa and, therefore, the West is left. So, once we have the storage capabilities, we are able to procure more and store accordingly.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 22 - Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Question put.

Head 22 agreed to.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceeding for a break and Parliament will resume when the bell is sounded.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.51 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.23 a.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We shall continue. My apologies to honourable Shalen Kumar. I must not have taken your note that you said that you wanted to raise a question because we are just moving straight ahead. Sorry about that, Sir.

Head 23 – Ministry of Housing

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments. Programme 1-1? .

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have a very simple question on SEG7 - National Housing Policy Implementation Plan. I would like to ask the Minister whether that Policy has been approved by Cabinet?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the National Housing Policy has not yet been approved by Cabinet. It is still currently under review. The consultations was held in May this year and another public consultation needs to be undertaken before it can come for Cabinet approval.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Yes, honourable Naisa and then honourable Bala.

HON. N. TUINACEVA.- On the same SEG7, Mr. Chairman, on the National Housing Policy Implementation Plan, \$95,000 was allocated for that last year and we have another \$63,000 in this year's budget. Is this still on consultation process? What is slowing this Plan from its implementation, et cetera, honourable Minister?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the \$63,000 that has been allocated will assist the Ministry of Housing for the following policy implementation and awareness:

- (1) Implementation of the National Housing Policy of \$35,000 after approval by Cabinet.
- (2) Awareness on the next revision of the National Housing Policy of \$15,000.
- (3) Awareness on other housing policies, like the First Home Ownership and Fire Grant which will further assist the Ministry in the promotion of its policies to the general public.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes, honourable Bala, then back to honourable Premila Kumar.

HON. P.K. PALA.- Mr. Chairman, just a supplementary to SEG7, can the honourable Minister confirm that this National Housing Policy Implementation Plan was approved in April this year?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the paper that was presented to Cabinet was not about the National Housing Policy but it was just to update Cabinet on the procedural steps that our Ministry was going to take in the process of that review. So that was the purpose of the paper that was approved by Cabinet.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Minister for Finance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There was a policy approved in 2011 so this allocation, as the Minister said, revised housing policy that set the discussion. There has been some work already done so the allocation is for the completion of that housing policy and implementation.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, yes, I agree that the housing policy was being formulated with the help of New Zealand assistance. My concern here, Sir, SEG7 says National

Housing Policy Implementation Plan. How can you implement a plan when the plan is not approved. So maybe the wording needs to change, that it is actually the formulation of a national housing plan.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the revised policy that is currently being discussed is not yet been completed. We are targeting to complete it before the end of this year, hopefully in the first quarter of the next financial year. That is where we are going to do more awareness and implementation of revised nation housing policy.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, on SEG 7 again, I am assuming confirmation by the honourable Minister that the National Housing Policy Implementation Plan will include those that are squatting on privately owned, Native and Crown lease?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the of the revisiting and reviewing of this Policy is to review the whole Housing Sector . We have also taken on board all stakeholders, all agencies, so as to ensure when we move ahead, we do not leave any sector behind. It is a very inclusive process and that is something that we have in mind when we are reviewing the National Housing Policy.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1?

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, Programme 2-1(10) HART - \$400,000. There is a reduction on the allocation given to HART. Is there any reason for that? Last year was \$500,000 and we have gone down by \$100,000 this year.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- The \$400,000 that we allocated this year is to cover for the operational cost which is around \$60,000, the reconstruction of two burnt flats at Newtown of \$120,000; as well as payment of professional fees for the two burnt flats at Nadera - \$9,500, as well as general maintenance.

We have been doing general maintenance of the HART complexes for some time, it is an ongoing exercise, and we are allocating \$210,000 to assist in the upgrading and renovation of the remaining HART flats.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Still on SEG 10, Mr. Chairman, can I just continue.

Honourable Minister, I can see funding for Habitat for Humanity Grant – Greenfield Pilot Project - \$500,000 in this year's budget, nothing on that in last year's budget. I think this must be the first time we are assisting Habitat Fiji for their projects, and I want to congratulate the Government for that, Sir.

The \$500,000 allocated for Habitat Fiji, it says that this is for Greenfield Pilot Projects. I just want to understand what is that Pilot Project and how do you arrive at that \$500,000?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Through you, Mr Chairman, the. Ministry has been receiving a request on how we can relocate families that are being served with eviction notices. Currently, we do not have any scheme in place to assist in that regard. So, what we have decided is to set aside some funds to assist the Ministry in relocating some of these families that have been evicted. For example, those people at Veidogo Settlement, they have been served with eviction notices.

The Ministry of Housing has signed an MOA with Habitat for Humanity to assist the Ministry in the identification as well as any green field or green space, or one of the existing sites that was acquired through development lease to assist in the relocation of these families. We do not understand because some of these families, because of the state of their income level and the struggles they have been facing, so we engage Habitat for Humanity to assist in the provision of some simple houses in the process of relocating them to some of these green field or existing land that we have acquired through our development leases.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-1(8) - Formalisation of Informal Settlements (\$13,468,756), for last year, it was \$10 million. What I want to know from the honourable Minister is, is this the rollover from last year to continue with these projects or are there new projects in this year's programme?

Secondly, the Ministry of Housing acquired close to 50 development leases from *mataqali* for the development of informal settlements. Unfortunately, some of the development leases have not been renewed. I can give you one example of Varavu in Ba, and I have discussed this with the honourable Minister for Finance. That lease was not renewed and now, the tenants are paying whatever they are supposed to pay to the landowners. What I am trying to say and justify is, at that point in time, taxpayers' money was paid to the respective *mataqali*. Do you not think it is the responsibility of the Government to continue with that programme, or just forget about those monies that were paid?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, there are two parts of that question, and I will try and answer the first one which is on the utilisation of the formalisation of informal settlement with the allocation of \$13.5 million.

Yes, there are four informal settlements that will be the continuation of the existing and formalisation that have been allocated in the current financial year. That is for Sakoca - \$2 million; Nasinu - \$2 million; Tavele, Nadi - \$1.4 million; Toria in Lautoka, as well as Field 4 of \$3 million. On the new capital projects, the formalisation of new projects for Valele in Ba - \$1 million; and Vunika in Labasa - \$1.8 million.

It also covers meeting some of the consultation engagement fees, covering consultation up to engineering drawings and phases of around \$1.7 million and the improvement of some of the basic amenities of \$250,000.

On your question on why the development lease for Varavu was not actually renewed, for any development lease, the onus is on landlord, and we have tried our very best to have consultation with the iTLTB on the renewal. Of course, we have requested iTLTB for the renewal of such development lease, and we have just been advised that there have been new demands now by the respective landowning unit, and that is something that we need to respect. But it does not take away the fact that we will have to continue, and also encourage iTLTB for the renewal of the development lease. So, we will continue our consultation with them and, hopefully, without any further new demands, we will be able to renew their leases. That was the only reason why the renewal of the development lease is still on hold.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, apart from Varavu, how many other development leases have not been renewed?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, I think that is the only development list that we have not renewed at the moment, the one at Varavu which is really a challenge now for the Ministry, while the other leases that we have, we managed to renew most of them.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Before I offer the floor to honourable Viam Pillay, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the public gallery of the New Zealand Deputy High Commissioner, Mr. Alex Shahryar-Davies. *Bula vinaka*, Sir. Also, a former politician, Mr. Rinakama and a gentleman from Wainibuka sitting in front of him.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Programme 2-1(10) - Housing Assistance for Persons Living With Disability (\$300,000). With the high demand of housing from Persons Living With Disability, is this \$300,000 enough?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That programme, honourable Member is to assist Fijians living with disability with a maximum grant of \$5,000 per applicant to upgrade their homes to accessible standards. So, that programme is for that. We think, based on the number of applicants, this is sufficient for one year.

HON. V. LAL.- Sir, I can see under SEG 10 that there is an allocation for Veikoba Bridge Project, \$2 million and it comes from the Housing Authority Capital Grant. Sir, my understanding is, this is a building of a bridge and it should come from the infrastructure budget. So, why are we using Housing's budget for this bridge project?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, that allocation is to assist the Housing Authority, that is, after consultation with the Fiji Roads Authority for the construction of that bridge. On the other side of the bridge is a parcel of land where Housing Authority is planning to develop. It is going to generate nearly 400 to 500 new lots to the people of Fiji. For the Housing Authority it is really a very significant project in terms of bridge construction. This is just to assist the Authority in doing some groundwork, feasibility study before discussions with the Fiji Roads Authority on that particular bridge. They are just assisting FRA in doing some of the preliminary works before the actual construction of the bridge.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Sir, if I can just add, this was a very conscious decision in the Budget because when we had the discussion with FRA, as the Minister quite rightly said, this could open a large number of lots and the problem that we had was this bridge. We said that this allocation within the Ministry of Housing Authority, we will allow them to provide this additional support, work with the FRA so that this bridge is completed as a matter of urgency so that they can start work. The development lease has already been granted, work has been done but this bridge is holding back the unleashing of these additional plots. I think it will be a big addition if we are able to do this quickly.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, who is doing the bridge? Is it the Housing Authority or the Fiji Roads Authority?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The honourable Member should know that Housing Authority is not going to build the bridge on its own. What we are doing is include it in this budget so that they can work with FRA and push this tender process and the construction of the bridge. What we are doing is trying to decentralise allocations to each concerned Ministry and is able to push for it to be done quickly. That is the idea of allocating this and giving it to the Authority. We have this big problem of centralisation, the honourable Leader of the Opposition knows this and we are trying to slowly do that so that things can be done as quickly as possible.

(Inaudible interjection)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Order Order! No running commentary, please.

HON. S. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, still on Programme 2-1(10) on Housing Assistance to Fire Victims (\$200,000). I just wanted to ask, roughly how many victims can be assisted from \$200,000 and what was the assistance rate in the last financial year?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Housing Assistance Grant is allocated to those families whose residential homes are affected through fire, a grant of \$5,000 is given and that \$5,000 will continue. So, from the \$200,000 that have been allocated, we are going to give \$5,000 per family whose house got burnt in this new financial year and there is a provision for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we are trying to move ahead and then all of someone has pulled out. You all raise your hands and we took note of it because as I stressed the importance of sticking to time here. Let us try and work together here, if you raise a question, that is your right to raise a question but when I allocate the time, please ensure that you stick to it or otherwise it is just a waste of time for all of us.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I wish to thank the honourable Minister for Housing and Community Development for his answers on SEG8 in relation to the formalisation of Informal Settlements. The issue that I had raised earlier, I would just like to clarify, I think this will also Qauia and Wakanisila. If he can just give us an update on what is the progress of that and whether Wakanisila will really happen?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You still have an interest in Wakanisila or is it outside...?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, for Wakanisila there is an issue, I think there is a church whose boundary is partly inside the development lease and partly within the mataqali land. This is something that we are trying to address with iTaukei Land Trust Board before we can move ahead with the project because I think something is very important and the landowners are also raising their concerns. For the Ministry, I think it is prudent that we address it first, but it would not take away the fact that we also going to have Wakanisila as part of our formalisation process.

Also, in Qauia, it is not here but something that we are also looking into. In one of the development plans that were done earlier on, there were concerns on those settlements that live alongside the Qauia River. What the Ministry is trying to do is, if these areas are prone to flooding, then we need to relocate them to higher ground and that is something that we are also discussing now with iTLTB if they have any unused land in Qauia that the Ministry can use to formalise the Qauia Settlement.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Programme 2-1(10) First Home Grant [Income Threshold - \$50,000 and below] and First Home Grant [Income Threshold - \$50,001 to \$100,000]. The First Home Grant - \$50,000 and below – I would like to know how many families benefitted and why only 68 percent of the fund was utilised?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- On the utilisation of this, for this current financial year, a total of 128 applicants were paid \$2.8 million as well as further applicants have been approved and will be paid out before end of this financial year amounting to \$150,000. Accordingly, a total of 134 applicants will benefit from this programme in the current financial year with a total payment of \$2.9 million.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- For the other programme, the First Home Grant (\$50,001 and above), again I would like to know how many families benefitted and what is the utilisation rate?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the utilisation for these housing grants for the current financial year currently sits at 75 percent and a total of 96 applicants have been assisted with a total payment of \$1.1 million and six6 applicants have been approved and will be paid by end of July amounting to \$75,000. Accordingly, a total of 102 applicants will benefit from this programme in the current financial year with the total payment of \$1.195 million.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on and Parliament will now vote on Head 23 – Ministry of Housing.

Question put.

Head 23 agreed to.

Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments ? Programme 1-1?

HON. H. CHAND. - Thank you, Mr. Chairman, under this Activity, I have got two questions. My first question is on SEG 7 – Development of Child Care Policy and Regulation. I can see that \$10,000 was allocated for the development of this policy last year and I have seen \$10,000 allocated again this year. Can the honourable Minister provide clarification on this?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am just finding the page. The development of the Child Care Policy has actually been finalized, this was completed by the IFC World Bank. It was brought to Cabinet and approved. What we are trying to encourage now is for employers to actually set up childcare facilities in their workplaces. This is really what the allocation was for. So, we are continuing the work to reach out to employers and organisations to do so because this will help with our women who can come to the workplace and have childcare facilities.

We are very excited about the proposed development of BPOs because like overseas, BPOs are known to have childcare facilities in their BPO parks so we hope that this will be the case. So, there is continued work in implementing this Child Cre policy around Fiji and so there is continued work dedicated to this course so that is why the allocation remains so that we can raise awareness of this, not just here in Suva but in all the different Divisions and Districts as well.

HON. H. CHAND. - Mr. Chairman, so that is not for the development. It is for the implementation am I right, honourable Minister?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, honourable Member. Like has been answered by previous Ministers, we do not just end at developing a policy, we need to implement them as well and so our teams are dedicated to carrying this out and yes that does assist with implementation as well.

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, my second question is on SEG 8. Last year \$250,000 was allocated for the construction of Lautoka Aged Care facility, my question is how was the money spent and I can see another \$225,000 given this year. How does the Ministry intend to use this money?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, I think I explained this in the last sitting of Parliament where we had commenced work to renovate the Ba Mission Hospital for the relocation of our current residents but that fell through and so we have had to now work and thank the Ba Provincial Holdings for offering the Matanakilagi House which will need renovation so that it is fit for purpose for our residents.

The construction of the new Lautoka Aged Care facility will need the demolition of the current facility but as we are doing scoping on that particular spot, we feel that perhaps it needs to be relocated to a different location for expansion purpose as well. I think this Government, or any government, should consider not just offering for our residents who come to us but also the possibility of looking at a voluntary facility where that voluntary facility can then fund the facility for those residents that are presented to us. So, a retirement living offered also by government. That is also in the plans. But to answer your question, it is still being scoped for the next financial year given the option of actually relocating that facility completely to another location.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have received a motion from honourable Seruiratu. This is the motion coming from your side as well, from the honourable Leader of the Opposition and if you care to introduce your motion, Sir?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I move a motion:

To increase the allocation in Head 24-1-1(7) - Economic Empowerment of Persons with Disability from \$10,000 to \$40,000.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I second the motion, Mr. Chairman.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, at first, I do acknowledge the Government and the honourable Minister for the allocation of \$10,000 for the purpose of economic empowerment of persons with disability. I did raise this in terms of the resilience level of our people in our communities and it involves economic empowerment, particularly for persons with disability.

We, in this Parliament have always talked about handouts, or whatever we want to call it, but this is a programme that I hope everyone will support, because we need to look after our people who, unfortunately, have limited access to employment and many other benefits. That is why I have moved this motion, Mr. Chairman, in the hope that we can consider increasing this allocation for the economic empowerment of our people with disabilities.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, perhaps, if I could respond to that motion, I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his motion. Yes, there is always a need to economically empower our people living with disabilities.

In terms of this allocation, we have found that people living with disabilities reach out to the Ministry more effectively through their organisations. If you look at SEG 6, we have the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, which is allocated over \$0.5 million. Then there is the Grant to Organisation for Persons with Disability (\$300,000).

In terms of organising themselves, that is more effective. This particular grant is really there if there is any individual who comes forward. I will give the example of the Rewa Disabled Women's Group who are thriving and doing very well in terms of planting and harvesting mushrooms and other cash crops. They are very visible and mobilised. It is a group of close to 200 people, including women and people living with disabilities.

The suggestion or the motion is noted, however, we would like to suggest, honourable Leader of the Opposition, that to be more effective in terms of accounting back to the Government in terms of utilisation, to support each other, the organisations are much more effective this way.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We still have three more speakers listed here.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, in the last sitting, the honourable Minister said that the allocation of \$250,000 is directed to the renovation of the new building. Am I right?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Good. So, that \$250,000, plus another round of \$350,000, that will be the total cost for the

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Sorry, what SEG is that?

HON. P.K. BALA.- SEG 8.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, honourable Member.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, that will be the total cost for the renovation of the building, around \$600,000.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- One allocation to the renovation of the Matanakilagi House so that our residents can be moved to that location. The other allocation is to the renovation of the current which is no longer because when they move it will be vacant, but as I mentioned, there is the option of actually relocating that particular Golden Age Home altogether because of the current space that is located at.

It is also located near a very busy intersection and for future growth, we should consider perhaps moving it to another location within Lautoka that has more acreage, there is more opportunity to have a senior citizens park, for more recreational activities, so that is what we are currently considering but we need to move our current residents first which is why Matanakilagi House is being renovated. So, that is a different allocation.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, it is a humble request for the Ministry or the Government to reconsider the location that you want to take those senior citizens to. I will give you the reason. It is just next to the highway.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- That building is facing two main roads. You can imagine the noise and the environment that is going to happen there. So, it is our plea if you can look into that.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Member.

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman. I am just seeking clarification on Programme 1-1(8) - Upgrade of Child Wellbeing Centre (\$230,000). I do understand that late last month and early this month, you did mention that you are wanting to set up the first ever Child Wellbeing Centre which I am thankful for because it caters for all the children that are roaming around our cities and towns. You are saying here that it is upgraded. So, you already have an existing building?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, I had indicated in my Budget Response Speech that we have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Methodist Church of Fiji.

They have donated their Vunirewa Bible School for us to use. So, yes, there is a current location and it does need renovation to be fit for purpose. So, that is what is being allocated in the current budget before us.

As I have also mentioned, it is still subject to Cabinet approval, as well as the consultation with line Ministries. It will have a clinical component which will need consultation with the Ministry of Health. It may also require consultation with the Ministry of Defence as the focal point, as well as possible, the review of police powers.

As you know we continue to state this to the media and those that ask that we do not have the power to just grab children off the streets or adults, unless there is a commission of a crime and when we do take them to return them to their homes, they come back to the streets. It is just for their safety to remove them off the street but not to confine them in such a centre.

That will also require the review of police laws for that purpose because as you know, if you are to commit anyone currently to St. Giles hospital, you need the consent of the family, a very close relative in order to that. So, there are different line Ministries that will be involved in this, so the consultation needs to take place. It is still subject to Cabinet approval, there is a programme component of it that also requires funding, but it is not contained in this budget because we are seeking donor funding for that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG8 – Renovation of Temporary Lautoka Aged Care Home (\$344,900), and I understand that is the Matanakilagi House. If that is the one, then I recall the Oral Question that I asked, you have said that this house will be renovated in eight months and the residents will move in. So, it means it is not done yet and the money was not utilised.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.-It has been done. We are still in the process of scoping before we can actually do the renovations, as you would understand as a former Minister, there are processes to follow. That is being undertaken.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, yes, definitely we know. This fund was given to the Ministry of Women for the whole of last year. This work was not done and now, this budget has come back in this year's Budget Estimate. We just hope that this work is completed. That is all I would like to say because this money is not spent and I recall, when you responded to that question, you said it in this Parliament, it is in the *Daily Hansard*, in eight weeks it will be renovated but it is not renovated. That is the point that I want to make.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Member, that is noted. The fact that it has not been used last year, I had explained in my response to that question, was that we had the funds ready to renovate the Ba Mission Hospital, even up to nine months into the project but that did not happen, that fell through. So, we had to look for another location and that took time so that explains why we were not able to utilise it in the last Budget year completely. But that is noted, thank you, honourable Member.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- On SEG9 - Purchase – Boat and Outboard Engine (\$18,000), I do not understand that allocation. Is there a correction that is required there?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, honourable Member, for the question. It actually is the cost of purchasing an 80 HP Long Shaft Outboard Engine for Kadavu to be fitted to the Kadavu eagle

boat which is what we use in Kadavu so that our officers can move around in Kadavu. So, that is the allocation of \$18,000.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Boat and Outboard Engine, honourable Minister, is that correct, and not 'Board'? If that can be taken care of, the correction?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Yes, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1?

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Honourable Minister, SEG5 - Expenses for Juveniles (\$35,000), it is a very important area that involves a lot of care, nurturing and rehabilitation work for our juveniles. Can you clarify on this expenses and is this enough for its purpose?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you honourable Member for the question. There has actually been an increase in this allocation. It was \$25,000 in the previous Budget, so I thank the honourable Minister for Finance for this increase because it does cater for the boys' welfare expenses, including school stationery, uniform, et cetera.

As you know, the Juveniles, when they come through the Centre, they are not staying there for a long period of time. They are usually in remand from around the Divisions in the country. It is probably one or two who are convicted, and they are staying at the home.

The expenses vary but there has been an increase, and like I mentioned, what it caters for, there is also travelling cost for the boys when they are allowed on a day out or for summer camps. It is part of their rehabilitation programme with the NGO that works with them which is called Inspire Pacific. There has been an increase in this allocation, and we are very thankful for that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on. Programme 2-2?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Programme 2-2(10) – Welfare Graduation Programme. I want to know the effectiveness of the programme? What percentage of people who went through the programme last year are no longer receiving assistance?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you honourable Member for the question. This welfare graduation programme, in the previous Government, a lot of allocation was not used, so we only saw the engagement of welfare recipients through the Jobs for Nature programme which is the World Bank programme. But as far as the Ministry is concerned, this allocation was not used but we had to go through this past year to actually have the positions for the setup of an actual Welfare Graduation Unit within the Department of Social Protection which never existed before.

We are setting up this Welfare Graduation Unit and we now currently engage two staff to be in that unit. As part of our review of the Social Protection Information System, we have to find those welfare recipients who have been on the programme for over 10 years and have continued to be on the welfare programme when they really should be graduated out of the programme, so this is being part of our work.

The need for a targeted approach so that we can identify these recipients who will then be trained, because the Ministry, will not be able to do this but to align them with institutions like Pacific Polytech and other vocational institutions, as well as placing them in places of employment through some, sort of, formal attachment or apprenticeship programme.

That is what we are working on, we just had the positions jilted as you know that weird word 'jilted' and you are very familiar as a former HR, but we have to do that and that took some time. So, they are now in the Welfare Graduation Unit and ready to roll for the next budget year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-1?

HON. H. CHAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Programme 3-1(8) - Completion of Fiji Barefoot College. I think last year, \$1 million was allocated. What is the progress on the completion of Fiji Barefoot College?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you honourable Member for the question. I want to start off by stating that the name that has been used which is the Barefoot College, that is currently under review in terms of the relationship between the Ministry and Barefoot College International. When I came into the Ministry, there was a breakaway from Barefoot India to Barefoot International and we met with them and they wanted to take up this project but what they had needed was our commitment from our end before they would seek funding to do this programme. That was in our opinion not secure enough. There was a legal battle between the two organisations about the use of name and logo so that, of course, created more delays for us. But in the meantime, we did look out for alternative providers like International Solar Alliance is willing to come on board but this is subject to Cabinet approval, of course.

The construction of the Nadogo Complex is near completion, you will see a reduction in the budget because these are just the final contractual payments for the completion of the project. The project is ready to go, we have the funds allocated to cater for the final payment to the contractor, Sambhu Lal Construction. The consultancy fees to the lead consultant Shri Singh and Associates and the installation of solar panels by the sub-contractor Clay Energy Limited. So that is what is left to pay, as you know in construction, there are always variations and final payments. So that is what it will cater for.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 6 – Grant to Women Institutions. What we have found out that the distribution of these funds is done equally, irrespective of the size of the institution. Do you think it is a fair way of doing this or you going to change the formula or the format that you have?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Sir, we actually have a reduction this year of \$100,000. We allocate it to five women's groups who have been doing their proper accounting back to the Ministry and have been proving their existence. We have the Makoi Vocational Centre, the Ba Women's Forum, the Life Bread Foundation and the Homes of Hope, so that is a \$100,000 each. We have reduced the other \$100,000 which was supposed to go a Women's Safe Shelter in Lautoka because we are still struggling to secure a vendor to run the shelter. We put out the tender, we put out the advertisements but there is being no office to run the Centre for us. The tender has been withdrawn and the \$400,000 should be sufficient to support the four institutions that are listed in this Financial Year.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, the honourable Minister has not answered my question. What I asked was that we had found out that this allocation was distributed equally to all the women institutions irrespective of the size or the membership of those institutions.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Member, again this is what has been undertaken from the previous government and what these women's groups have proven, it is not necessarily the size that matters, it is the activities that they undertake and the frequency of activities and the training that they conduct, they continue to make submissions and acquittals that meet what the Ministry requires. So, there have been no accountability or governance issues from these organisations. In fact, Ba

Women's Forum which you should be very proud of honourable Member, has done such great work and today they have not requested further funding. So, they are pretty well funded too from other sources.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 24 – Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection.

Question put.

Head 24 agreed to.

Head 25 – Ministry of Youth and Sports

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments, any comments?

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.- Mr. Chairman, needing clarification from the honourable Minister on Programme 1-1(5) – Fiji National Youth Band. How many band members would be paid from the Fiji National Youth Band allocation; and will they be employed as a part-time or full-time employee?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, from the outset of Ministry of Youth and Sports' core roles are to empower the youths of Fiji and promote sports as a means of fostering community coercion, healthy lifestyles and national pride. In addition to its core responsibilities focusing and facilitating youth and sports development through the establishment of a conducive policy environment and having strategic support structures. This year we have been allocated \$23.4 million, a 20 percent increase from last year's budget. We go to the question being asked by the honourable Member and I him you for that.

The Fiji National Youth Band, currently we have absorbed most of the Band members into establishments and General Wage Earners (GWE), about 10 of them and we are left with three.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO.– SEG 10 – Upgrade of Youth Training Centre. Which Youth Training Centre would be upgraded and funded from this allocation? Does this allocation include the repairs of the burnt down Naleba Training Centre?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- The allocation in SEG 10 is for Yavitu Youth Training Centres. As you know from last year, people were allocated certain amount of money as well, but due to things that are beyond our control on the delivery, we could not do that upgrade. We are raising it again for this year for Yavitu Training Centre. It does not include Naleba Training Centre. Naleba we are still negotiating with a donor agency if they can fund Naleba, we are still talking to them right now.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(5) - Volunteer Expenses Claim. Can the honourable Minister clarify that?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, the Volunteer Expenses is to cater for additional staff engaged through NEC on volunteer basis in assisting the Ministry during emergency basis and also provide work experience for our young Fijians. We do have volunteers too in the Ministry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 1-3.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr .Chairman, honourable Minister which company is providing services for the Social Media Management at a rate of \$45,000? SEG 5, my apologies.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- It is on Activity 3, I am sorry. Mr. Chairman, this allocation is used for the upgrade of the communication and media gadgets marketing and publication for the Ministry. We have our IT Unit and that is allocated for them.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A question raised is what company? You are saying, honourable Minister that is an internal one?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, this is done in-house.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on Programme 2-1(6), Sports Scholarships. I note that this budget has been reduced from \$300,000 to \$190,000. If the honourable Minister can clarify the reason for this reduction, or whether this money has been given to TELS for sports scholarships? If you can kindly explain that?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, the reduction is largely due to low utilisation, plus a lot of these sport men and women are also eligible for other scholarships under TELS, if they want to study in any other field. That is why the utilisation was low and that is why we reduced it a little bit.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, a question to the honourable Minister for Finance. Do you not think this should go under TELS rather than the Ministry of Youth and Sports?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, there are specific sporting programmes where they want to get training, for example, if someone wants to get into archery, it is a short training programme somewhere in Korea, so they will get a scholarship but by and large, the utilisation was small so we have reduced it, because a lot of those young men and women are studying at different universities, so they do not engage in specific scholarships which will take them away from here.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, thank you for your explanation. It is hard to believe that Fiji being a sporting nation, there is not a lot of uptake for this sports scholarships. Now I understand, maybe through your social media management and awareness raising, the numbers can go up.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, currently the scholarships awards, there are:

- Swimming - eight recipients
- Athletics - one recipient (Yeshnil Karan)
- AFL – six recipients plus one coach
- Gymnastics - one recipient
- Archery - two recipients
- Yachting - one recipient on part time

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, do you still want to go into those details?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- No, Mr. Chairman, the question has been answered.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-1(5), Purchase -Sports Equipment (\$20,000). My question to the honourable Minister is whether it is sufficient, and the purchase of sports equipment is for which organisation?

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Chairman, we have allocated \$20,000 for sports equipment. I think at the moment we feel that we are content with the budget allocated for that. This is to assist youth clubs and sporting organisations that need assistance on sports equipment like rugby balls, tackle bags, soccer balls, volleyballs so they are assisted from this fund.

HON. A.N. TUICOLO. - Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-1(8), needing clarification from the honourable Minister. How many hard courts will be constructed from the allocation, will it also include the maritime islands?

HON. J. SAUKURU. - Mr. Chairman, the construction of hard courts, there has been an allocation for this Financial Year - one for Holy Cross, Natabua Housing, Tatayaya in Rakiraki and Tuatua, Labasa. That's for the completion for the Tuatua hardcourt in, Labasa.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head No. 25.

Question put.

Head 29 agreed to.

Head 30 – Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question to the honourable Minister for Agriculture is Programme 1-1(6) – Agriculture Marketing Authority – Operating Grant has been reduced by \$500,000. Since AMA plays a crucial part in market accessibility for all our farmers, will this grant not reduce their capacity to perform and also in the SEG 10 – Agriculture Marketing Authority – Capital Grant of \$1 million has been allocated. Will the Minister be kind enough to advise what would this grant be used for?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, the reduction was justified and AMA can operate within the amount that has been given. For the AMA Capital Grant from SEG10, that is used by AMA for procurement of agricultural produce.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, honourable Minister. I would have loved more details. In SEG 6 also, the honourable Minister in one of his Ministerial Statements emphasized that the Ministry is embarking on a programme for alleviating poverty through agriculture. However, I fail to see any allocation of funds for this activity. Would the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways be kind enough to advise how they are going to proceed with this programme if there is no financial allocation for this activity?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- I think there is an allocation of 200,000.

HON. S. NAND.- Where is this located?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Planning and Development, would you like to help here?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, just on honourable Nand's earlier question on Agriculture Marketing Operating Grant, the reduction of \$500,000, they also have term deposits in other institutions that we assessed. We are also saying that they need to be reviewed, so that is why there is a reduction in the grant.

On your question on poverty alleviation, there is no allocation as such because the allocation that we provided, as you know, the big increase in total of the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways Budget last year continued this year and there are a number of programmes within the different programmes and activities, such as subsidies for non-sugar crops sectors, subsidies for increase in the prices of commodities, particularly rice which we feel is part of the overall strategy for poverty reduction. So, there is no specific allocation as such.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you. The honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways has just advised that \$200,000 has been allocated.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- My apologies, we have asked for \$200,000 but we were told that we can work from within our programmes that are already there.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That was the request, the honourable Minister is correct.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, if I may just add on to what the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics said because I think the other side needs to understand this, the way that we are approaching diversification, for example, we are opening up all the rural areas so the amount of investment on rural roads at the moment is unheard of in the country right now. What is actually happening is that it is opening up access. You can see on the ground that people are planting a lot more and we will continue with that investment this year.

For the delta in Tailevu and Rewa, we are doing drainage that will dry up that area and allow bigger opportunities for actually planning. That is the way we are approaching poverty alleviation. It is not a specific allocation because that is a handout. What we are doing is providing opportunities for people to work and produce for themselves.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I have a motion here from honourable Koroilavesau. Would you like to introduce your motion Sir?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have come into discussions with the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council during our meeting with the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. I think our Chairman, honourable Tubuna and honourable Tuinabuna, who is the Assistant Minister for Agriculture understands this and I think honourable Kiran will also vouch for it, that this small organisation does a lot of coordination....

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You are just introducing, I need a seconder, before you elaborate on your motion.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- My apologies, Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am running right ahead. I wanted an increase in the allocation given to Fiji Crop and Livestock Council.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That motion has been seconded. Thank you, you have not finished.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have already made the introduction. This small organisation does a lot of coordination between the farmers and the Ministry of Agriculture and does a lot of work on the ground. I understand that they have been given an allocation of \$500,000 but I take that they have requested for an increase, so I am just putting a motion to increase their funding by \$500,000 to take it up to \$1 million.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, the work of the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council is really to compliment some of the work that was carried out by our Extension Division in particular. I think the \$500,000 given to them is enough.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I can just add, Mr. Chairman, for honourable Koroilavesau's satisfaction, we had specifically allocated in the last budget a provision for purchase of vehicle and that has been done, so we have reduced the amount this year. The honourable Minister for Agriculture agrees that we need to review the functions of the Crop and Livestock Council, to align it with the work that the Minister quite rightly pointed out to the Research and Extension and training components of the Ministry of Agriculture. It is a reasonable allocation based on what they requested and we feel this is adequate.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I am satisfied with the explanation that has been given. I would like to withdraw that motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion is withdrawn. We will move on. Programme 1-2?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1-2(10) - Commercial Farmers Equity Package; Commercial Agriculture Development Programme. I have looked at Head 50 as well, no change from last year. All the allocations remain. I know the purpose of this programme. I just want to ask the Minister, how is this being taken up? Is it really well utilised and are we feeling the impact?

Sir, I will also make a plea here on behalf of the Minister, the honourable Minister for Finance has been talking about decentralisation. I have looked at Head 50, I think just a difference of \$2 million has been decentralised. This is what the Ministry, having served as an Agricultural Minister, hopefully that most of the items under Head 50 on (R), if it can be decentralised, but we work out the process because it is important in agriculture is seasonalities.

Sometimes when we finish all the processes, the season is gone. If we want the impact because most of it are just short term and medium term impacts. If you give that opportunity to the Minister, he can do much. I hope it can be considered for next year's budget, not only the increase but the decentralisation - give him the powers, set up the process.

Honourable Minister, is it going fast enough and what is the impact?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, the Commercial Agriculture Programme is really part of the Ministry's efforts in trying to develop value added products. The bigger picture is exporting fresh products to overseas markets which poses a lot of problems for us. There are quarantine issues due to pest and disease status of countries where we are exporting to. These hinders the export of fresh products to those markets.

In fact, if you can recall I had called out Australia here in Parliament after our ginger could not get through to Australia. There was an oversupply of ginger last year. This programme on SEG 10 – Commercial Agriculture Development Programme is really to see that local companies take up the value-added processing activity. There are already local companies that are doing that and there are new companies that have joined, but we hope to see that more companies take up the challenge of value adding local agriculture produce.

I always say that first of all, we must get our people get used to local value added products such as Cassava Chips, Dalo Chips, Kumala Chips, Cassava Flour, Breadfruit Flour. First of all, local

people must get used to it, buy it, consume it, before even thinking of exporting it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I think the point raised by the honourable Leader of the Opposition is a very good one. In fact, I can tell you that this year, we have reduced the “R” from almost about \$1.7 billion to about \$1.2 billion.

There is always a risk of virement, there is always a risk of funds being diverted but we are looking at Ministries, particularly Ministries such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education where we want to reduce the ‘Rs’ and also a possible Head 50 as well in terms of grants so that you said quite rightly that they can use that effectively.

The Commercial Farmers Equity Package is really providing equity for commercial loans assistance on a case by case basis and upscaling smallholder farmers if they want to go and do that. It is a good programme and one that could be very effective. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Joseph Nand, your question before we come back to honourable Sachida Nand.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on SEG 7 – Public Consultation - Review of Agriculture Laws - \$10,000. A question to the honourable Minister, what type of review are you trying to do in public consultation?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, the laws that govern agriculture in this country are quite old, in fact, they go back to colonial days. So, we need to review some of those laws to be on par with how far we have moved in agriculture so that we can be on par with the rest of the world. Thank you.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1-2(7) - Research Council (\$100,000), the funding has increased from \$20,000 to \$100,000, a 500 percent increase. Which Council is this and what are the funds for?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, there is a Research Council within the Ministry that conducts meetings every quarter. It consists of the Director Research and Senior Officers of the Ministry. This fund is for that purpose.

HON. S. NAND.- For the meetings?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Yes, but not only for the meetings, there are other activities.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, one of the key things is that agriculture involves a lot of science. Out of the Council, they make publications which is called the Agriculture Journal. That makes us competitive and relevant in the scientific world because most of the research is done, we have released new varieties, and that is where the publication of Agriculture Journal comes in, and it is distributed all over the world. So, that is another function of this Council.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 1-4(7) - Agriculture Show (\$200,000), is the Ministry going to have shows in all Divisions, or is it going to be one central show?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, there will be one central show.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we have come to Programme 2, and I would like to adjourn Parliament now for lunch and when we resume at 2.30 p.m., we will go straight into the Ministry of Agriculture, again, on Programme 2. Then we will take our usual break during this Budget session, the afternoon tea and dinner at 6.00 p.m. We are hoping to complete everything by this evening, so come tomorrow, we will be straight into the Consequential Bills. I hope you do not mind that.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.59 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.25 p.m.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Now into Programme 2-1.

HON. S. NAND.- Programme 2-1(8) Upgrade and Enhancement - Offices and Quarters (\$1.5 million). In a particular divisions and offices, this is being done or is it just earmarked for all the officers.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- All.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is how we always got our answers or reply from the previous government. It was simply “yes” or “no”. Yes, honourable Sachida, you are comfortable?

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 2. We have two motions from honourable Sachida Nand.

Programme 2-2(8) - Women in Agriculture Programme. His recommending an increase of about \$100,000.

The second one Programme 2-2(10) - Fertiliser and Weedicide Subsidy. He is recommending an increase to \$500,000 from the current allocation in the proposed Budget.

Honourable Sachida, you may introduce the first one - Programme 2-2(8), Women in Agriculture Programme. We will go one by one.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, under Head 30, I propose that we increase by \$100,000 in Programme 2-2(8) in respect for Women in Agriculture.

HON. P.K. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Please, elaborate on your motion, Sir.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, women are now taking a prominent role in agriculture and are more and more involved in subsistence and commercial farming, not only in crops but they are venturing into livestock including dairy farms. The involvement cannot go unnoticed and now they are playing a very prominent role and this needs to be encouraged so that more and more women can take up agriculture or farming professionally.

As such, Mr. Chairman, I move that Women in Agriculture Programme be increased by another \$100,000 to assist more women to participate in the agriculture activity and also assist in poverty alleviation. This is not a point scoring motion but a motion that is needed so that women can actively be involved. They have been traditionally involved in farming but not taking prominent roles. Now they are and I would request the Government to increase this allocation so that more women can be empowered to take up agriculture professionally.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is to increase it from \$300,000 by another \$100,000, to take it up to \$400,000, honourable Sachida Nand?

HON. S. NAND.- Yes.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr Chairman, while the comment is appreciated, one thing we must keep in mind is that we have women farmers in almost all the programmes. We have women goat farmers, women dairy farmers, women beef farmers, women sheep farmers who can access funding from those commodity funding and to have \$300,000 just for women, that should be appreciated. So, any other funding that they will need, they can access because there is no discrimination for all the other assistance. Are we okay with that, honourable Sachida Nand?

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, the answer is good but I would have loved to get women directly involved and this is the way of encouraging and empowering them to take control and it would have good initiative.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Point is taken, Mr. Chairman.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think that is a good suggestion, increasing, but the utilisation last year was only \$260,100 so we kept it at \$300,000 so there is still room to help additional women there, but we can look at it next year.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So honourable Sachida, do you still want to continue?

HON. S. NAND.- I'm okay with that motion, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You still want to continue with it?

HON. S. NAND.- I would like to have a vote on this.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Okay, then will put that to the vote.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The second motion from honourable Sachida Nand. I will invite him to introduce his motion.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, I move that Head 30 be increased by \$500,000 in Programme 2-2(10) with respect to Fertiliser and Weedicide Subsidy (Dalo, Ginger, Cassava, Vegetables).

HON. P. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, vegetable farmers are an integral part of our agriculture sector and like any other commodity these farmers need assistance. I see that in the Extension Programme, apart from Fertiliser and Weedicide subsidy, there is no other subsidy, and I did mention this in my response to the Budget Address.

It is important to assist these farmers because weedicide and fertiliser are not only the two expenses. There are seeds, insecticides which have a toll on the farmers, therefore I request that Fertiliser and Weed Subsidy be increased by another \$500,000. The activity should include Seed and Pesticide Subsidy so that they are encouraged to produce quality vegetables and have this commodity available to our consumers locally and this will also assist in reducing the import bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The proposal here is to increase from \$1 million by another \$500,000.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, we can make do with the \$1 million that is already there because there are other programmes. For example, dalo, ginger and there is another root crop programme which can take care of what the honourable Member has mentioned.

For some of these crops, we would rather just leave the trade of planting materials to the market force without interference because we have interfered before and it has resulted in the under cutting of the prices that which farmers were trading with those who needed planting materials. So, we do not want to go there again, but I do agree that there needs to be some subsidy for seeds, but again in most of the programmes, we also supply seeds.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I could just add to what the honourable Minister said. This allocation also includes vegetable farmers as well this time plus in addition to the \$1 million allocation here, the subsidy for rice farmers has been to, as we discussed yesterday to the Fiji Rice Limited themselves. So, they will be responsible for providing the subsidy to the rice farmers. Vegetable farmers will be included in the allocation here. That is why the subsidy allocation here remains the same as last year in addition to what has been given to rice.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, I see rice farming, coconut farming, cocoa, ginger, vanilla, *yaqona*, *dalo* all having separate allocation for the Extension Programme and Assistance. Vegetable farming or horticulture is very important. Everyday you need to go to the market and farmers need assistance.

Farmers are struggling with pests and high cost of seeds. There should be some funds available so that these farmers have access to these funds and can get seeds or pesticides at a subsidised rate and in the small blue book, we have compared ourselves with India as a growing economy. India hugely subsidises its agricultural sector, that is why they are able to produce so much of vegetables or agriculture produce.

I think it is high time we should concentrate on agriculture and also not leave horticulture behind. Horticulture is something, fruits and vegetables are something that needs to be looked at and vegetable farming is something that needs to assisted vegetable farming and green crop farming.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is your right of reply, honourable Sachida?

HON. S. NAND.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. You still want us to go for the vote?

HON. S. NAND.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, now we will put his motion to the vote.

Question on amendment put.

Motion lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-3. We have another motion here from honourable Sachida Nand. May you introduce your motion, Sir?

HON. S. NAND.- No, Mr. Chairman, that is not for that Activity, it is for Programme 3-2.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Okay, Programme 3-1?

HON. V. NAUPOTO.- Mr. Chairman, it is Programme 3-1(7), this is on behalf of our furry friends, cats and dogs. We have \$130,000 allocated this year, thank you. It is the same amount last year, but the stray cats and dogs are still increasing. Maybe for next year if we can increase this also. If we can also think about tax concessions for those that want to donate, for example the SPCA, so if CJS is going to donate \$100,000 to SPCA, if they can get concession the same as we do to sporting organisations. They do a big job in looking after our stray animals, there is one animal shelter in Ba - the Greater Good Foundation. They have 200 dogs right now in there.

I saw last week that they were asking for donations for 700 kilogrammes of rice for their food for the next few months. So maybe a plea rather than anything else to change for next year, maybe we can look at increasing this and think about the concession for those that want to donate. One big contributing factor to animal cruelty is the high cost of medicine for animals. I am not too sure whether we can have some subsidy also on animal medicine so that when our animal get injured or sick we are able to afford to buy the medicine and keep them rather than just throw them out onto the streets.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It is a very interesting contribution.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Point is taken, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- In some provinces they eat this thing such as Lomaiviti, Bua. They are very good, it is a delicacy; eating cats, dogs and everything.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- For the honourable Members information, there is an additional \$530,000 allocated under Programme 3-2 for Stray Animals. Some funding from there could also be used if it is necessary.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 3-1(5) – Purchase – Veterinary Drugs (\$6,000). There is another allocation of \$1 million in Programme 3-2. Why are these spread over two different Activities when the intention is to get Veterinary Drugs? Why are we doing central procurement so that we do not have procurement issues?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, I can explain that. Programme 3-1(5) is to cater for the purchase of drugs for the Veterinary Laboratory and Programme 3-2(5) is for the clinics in Stations.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, one is for the livestock and the other one is for Vet specifically. The livestock drugs are different.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, I am sure the honourable Minister for Finance would understand that livestock drugs and other drugs if you are using in the Veterinary Laboratory, livestock drugs have a heavy procurement and they require more.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, that is why I am saying it is separate.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, the Vet laboratory and the Clinic are different.

HON. S. NAND.- Understood, Mr. Chairman.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, we have the two different institutions that use these drugs. One is the Veterinary Laboratory and the other is the general extension work carried out by Livestock Officers, and those are two separate uses of drugs.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 3-2(10) - Upgrade of Nasinu and Vuda Abattoir - FMIB (\$400,000). For a long time, there was a talk about moving this Nasinu Abattoir but now, we are upgrading it. Does that mean that it is going to stay there for good, because there were complaints about the Abattoir? I am talking as a person from Nakasi, so I declare my interest.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, we cannot leave the Abattoir in its current state to fall into ruins. We still need to upgrade and maintain, even though the plans are already there to move the current Abattoir from Naulu to Navuso. However, that does not mean that we do not maintain it because we have to keep certain standards in the Abattoir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 3-2(9) - Stray Animals Control Campaign (\$530,000). Again, it has been highlighted to address this issue with a lot of compassion, so if the honourable Minister can clarify what is all being done or will be done in this control campaign, and if this amount is sufficient for the bigger problems that we have with stray animals?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, the campaign to control stray animals is quite a lengthy and cumbersome process. We first have to work with the community and then there are animal groups that are heavily involved when it comes to the control of stray animals. Then we have to take the community through, so it is like an awareness programme. Then we start putting up notices before we finally carry out the actual, whether it is bating, caging or even shooting.

Mr. Chairman, normally what happens is while we are still in this process, the damage is done. For example, when dogs attack goats in a goat farm or sheep farm, they do not tell you that they are going to come. They will just come in groups, stay around the farm, find a really nice cool place to lie down and then when everything there is right, then they attack. Very intelligent animal. The worst thing is, they do not eat the whole carcass. They just bite the neck, take the blood out and off they go.

Mr. Chairman, when we talk to farmers who have gone through the dog attack and had like dozens of animals killed, it becomes a very emotional issue. As a government, we have farmers on one side and we have animal activists on the other side. At one time, I made a statement that may be, we need to shoot the dogs. I was crucified on the press, but you know, that came out of frustration. I talked with the farmers because to me, livestock is more important than the dogs, especially when it is wild dogs. It is a very sensitive and complex exercise.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- A question on stray dogs in the urban areas. Last year, what kind of work was undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture to trap the dogs in the urban area?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, it is a continuous exercise.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Is that also part of this funding that you have received.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Yes. Just to tell you a story, some mornings when I take a walk in front here, stray dogs sleeping on the steps of Parliament. I think one weekend I came, there were about seven dogs.

HON. T.N. TUINABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, if I can add on to the honourable Minister's response to the question, our work in the Ministry is also coordinated with Municipalities. We work

with Municipal Authorities and we address stray animal campaign in towns and cities differently, compared to when we deal with stray animals on farms.

To go back to the cost of stray animals, we have a lot of operational costs in stray animal because we have to maintain pounds where we will hold animals and we will have to look after animals, depending on the number of days that is required before they are released. So, there is a component of operational cost in that capital cost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Before we proceed further, I have a motion here from honourable Sachida Nand that is to do with Programme 3-2(10). Honourable Sachida Nand to introduce his motion.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I move

That Head 30 be increased by \$1 million in Programme 3-2(10) in respect to Dairy Development Programme.

HON. P. RAVUNAWA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I second the motion

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Dairy Sector needs continued support from the Government to assist in rejuvenating the industry. Farmers have been affected by Brucellosis and Tuberculosis and the person has lost a considerable amount of stock on the farm.

Government, last year, injected a record of \$5 million into the industry and I am very grateful for that. This year, the allocation has been reduced by \$1 million. This reduction will hinder some of the activities that was being planned to be carried out in the dairy industry.

I request the Government to re-instate this \$1 million so that activities can continue without disruption. The farmers were very grateful for the Government's continued assistance. Last year, they eagerly awaited the reinstatement of \$1 million back into the Dairy Development Programme so that they can continue with all the activities.

I must stress, again, I acknowledge the Government's record assistance with the industry and would be grateful if they continue doing that.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I acknowledge the sentiments echoed by the honourable Member, I think the decision to reduce the grant on this Dairy Programme the honourable Member is very much familiar with and the utilisation rate has been slow. So, I think that decision was taken due to the slow utilisation rate of the funds that they were given. But I guess come the next Budget, we should be able to get back to what it was.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Sachida Nand your right of reply here.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, honourable Minister. I look forward to the increment so that they can continue with all the activities. This sector is on a downward spiral at the moment and the Government's continued assistance is needed to revitalise it and also to reduce our import bill because 50 percent of what we consume is important and we have potential to reduce this import and thank you for your assurance that this will be looked into the next budget.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Do you still want to continue

HON. S. NAND.- No, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The motion has been withdrawn and we shall continue. Programme 3-3?

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, Programme 3-3(8), there has been an allocation of \$1.04 million for the Beef Breeding Programme. Can the honourable Minister for Agriculture and Waterways elaborate that this is purely for beef breeding or in the same context, you will also be handling dairy into it because in the breeding programme they can be simultaneously run for both beef and dairy.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Yes, we have at least four breeds that we are currently developing. One of the breed - brown Swiss is both, for beef and dairy breed. I think you must have had a chance to see the animal, the frame makes it out to be a beef animal, but the udder really makes it out to be good for dairy. So, yes, we do have that allowance.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We shall move on. Programme 5-1?

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 5-1(7) - Climate Smart Agriculture (\$250,000), I would be grateful if the honourable Minister could elaborate on what commodities are being looked at, together with what actions will be carried out under this programme?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Mr. Chairman, this is an ongoing programme that involves the development of indigenous rootcrops and even livestock. This indigenous livestock and rootcrops have shown resilience over time. There are teams that go out to the islands and they have identified species of yams, coconuts and even pigs for that matter. So that is what is involve in this climate smart agriculture programme.

HON. S. NAND.- Thank you, honourable Minister, for your explanation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Is that part of the climate change development?

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- Yes, Mr. Chairman.

HON. V.T.T.K. RAYALU.- In fact, if you go to Koronivia, Mr. Chairman, you will find in the piggery, there is a whole section dedicated to indigenous pig breed. In fact, they do much better in terms of their mothering skills than the introduced breeds.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. Honourable Tunabuna.

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is information for those who do not really know indigenous breeds, it is not only for crops, it is also for livestock. They have stood the test of weather and times, and they have very good mothering abilities, especially for livestock, and they can stand the change in weather conditions. Indigenous breeds have been part of the breeding programme in Koronivia for the last decade and have been supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization. So, it is an ongoing programme for the Ministry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. How long does it take before a breed is being introduced to becomes indigenous, or is it like the trees, the pine and mahogany and other indigenous trees?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- Depending on the different breed, their time will become localised.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Depends on what?

HON. T.N. TUNABUNA.- It could be more than five years, depending on the species as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 30 - Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways.

Question put.

Head 30 agreed to.

Head 31 – Ministry of Fisheries

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Whilst the floor is now open for any comments, we will dive straight into Programme 1-1.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask the honourable Minister on the Aid-In-Kind – Promotion for Regional Soid Waste Initiative, if she can explain on that initiative.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, what you have in front of you is a misprint. The project is supposed to read, “The Project on Pacific Islands Capacity Enhancement for Achieving SDG14” and this project is solely to enhance capacity of the officials of the Ministry of Fisheries to coordinate regional trainings to other Pacific Island countries to promote marine conservation and sustainable fisheries development to achieve SDG 14 targets.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- That is still Aid-In-Kind?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, Sir.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Just a question whether the amount mentioned here is the same amount for the name change?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, honourable Member, the amount is the same but the project name is different.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-1(7) – Inshore Compliance and Enforcement (\$300,000). This amount that has been budgeted over the years, but this year has been a slight decrease. I think the honourable Minister will realise after going on tours that this is something you are constantly asked about, about making sure that there is compliance and enforcement of the fishing laws around those areas. I am just wondering whether the honourable Minister given the constant problems that we have had over the years and the similar budget, whether this budget is addressing these needs for ensuring compliance and enforcement in inshore areas.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, yes, SEG 7 will address the need for inshore compliance and enforcement. It is implemented by the Inshore Compliance and Enforcement Division to ensure the enforcement of the relevant laws and legislations within the inshore sector.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Will that involve fisheries wardens and all that?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, Sir.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Sir, are we on Programme 2-2?

HON. MEMBER.- Programme 1-1.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Sorry, my question is on Programme 2-2.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on Programme 2-2(1) – Sea Going Allowance – Regional Observers Programme (\$200,000). Why I am asking the honourable Minister is that this Observer Programme is basically we are providing Observers for regional countries to be carried on board foreign ships that are serving the other island countries in the Pacific.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Sorry, Mr. Chairman, I did not get the honourable Member's question.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Under the Regional Observers Programme, Fiji provides Observers on international fishing vessels that operate with other Pacific Islands. So basically, we are seconding them to provide that service because they do not have observers in those regions. My understanding was that they were paying for those observers being seconded.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the sea going allowance for the Regional Observer Programmes, not only do they go on foreign vessels that has been mentioned by the honourable Member, they are also placed on long line Fiji licenced fishing vessels. So, they also assist the national observers in the vessels that are licenced to Fiji, based in Fiji and are flagged to Fiji.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Let us move on. Programme 2-3.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 2-3(8), Fish Cage Culture Research Project (\$700,000). I would like to get a clarification on that Programme, because this is the first time that I am seeing it?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the increase is to cater for the procurement and installation of solar at the Makogai Research Station. This is to allow for the production of 12,500 giant clam juveniles for 24/7 stable power supply and to provide a backup system to the hatchery. That is the reason for the increase is to cater for that.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, can I just make a clarification. Does that cost \$700,000?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. The increase is mainly to procure the equipment for solar panels for the Makogai Research Station.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- It is written here "fish cage".

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, I understand that the project is Fish Cage Culture Research Project which is based in Makogai, the increase from \$300,000 from the last financial year to \$700,000 for the next financial year, is mainly to cater for the procurement of solar panels for the Research Station.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, I was going to ask that question too on the fish cage culture, but I am confused by the explanation given by the honourable Minister. I have seen fish cage culture in other places like India, but I will probably have to go to Makogai again to see what fish cage culture is like the one that they are doing there.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, last year the budget for this was \$300,000, now it has gone up to \$700,000. In these two years we have not yet cultured and produced any fish in cages. Are we still in the development phase where we still not have reached the stage of culturing or growing fish within cages, that we are still developing the infrastructure? Will that be a correct statement to say?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, over the years we have developed clams that we have put out to the other reef systems. It is an ongoing project with Makogai, we continue to spawn, rear and put out these clams, crustaceans, turtles and all the marine species that are cultured at Makogai. It is an ongoing project, and we have over the years fed our reef systems with what has been spawned at Makogai.

HON. P.K. BALA.- And all \$300,000 was used last year.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, maybe they should change the name instead of “fish caging” because fish caging is basically breeding fish in cages and then float them in the ocean where they breed them to adult and then they sell it. So, maybe they should change the name to avoid the confusion.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, in the past, the project was known as the Makogai Development Project. I think under the previous administration, the name was changed to Fish Cage Culture Research Project.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- There are three former Ministers for Fisheries on this side.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Sir, I am speaking from experience while I was at the Ministry.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sorry, Mr. Chairman, it seems that we are focussing only now on marine but there is also cage culture particularly on freshwater and this is a big opportunity for Fiji. The dam in Navua was wanst, there was a study on it. This was the rice dam in Navua for freshwater fish cage culture. And with that technology, Sir, you just use floaters, and you breed fish inside the nets. You just change the sizes of the nets every now and then according to the growth pattern of the fish. That is a huge opportunity for Fiji. So, probably if the Ministry for Fisheries can consider fish cage culture in freshwater as well. It is available with most of our development partners, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- He is just making a statement there. No need to reply, honourable Minister.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Noted, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just take note.

Activity 4?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I seek clarification. On Activity 2-4(4), Operations of Ice Plants (\$440,000).

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Clarification is sort there, honourable Minister.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Programme 2-4, the increase in allocation is to enable the Ministry to operate the 24 ice plant machines nationwide and this will also include the purchase of equipment, needed spare parts of the hatchery equipment, et cetera.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I have a motion here from the honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I wanted the same allocation for operation of ice plants to be increased. This is a major challenge for the Ministry of Fisheries where ice plants are all distributed through the maritime islands and the isolated communities and they would normally breakdown. The breakdown of these ice plants causes the whole chain events of the fishing activities within those communities.

In certain areas and in certain times, ice plants in maritime islands like Vanuabalavu, Lakeba and Rabi when they breakdown, it will take 3 to 6 months without been solved. It stops the whole fishing mechanism within those islands. All I am asking is to increase the allocations so that there is a better support system. I can say we had to buy two generators from the government of Japan. They gave us money to fund that. Instead of fixing generators, we just take the generators, place it, take the old one and then replace it again after its repaired. That is all I am asking for, if we increase that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We just get the seconding for the motion.

HON. V. PILLAY.- I second the motion, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- And he had already elaborated on his motion.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Sorry for that, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, you want to make any comments on the motion; increased to \$540,000 the maintenance of ice plants.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I think the increase of \$140,000 is sufficient for the next financial year.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- It is okay if she says that but I can guarantee her that she will have problems.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- So, withdraw this motion now.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 5.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would just like to seek the Koro Fisheries Stations which has been ongoing for about four years now. I just wanted to ask where it is now and what stage they have reached?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Koro Fisheries Station honourable, Minister for Fisheries and Forestry.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the allocation for the construction of Koro Fisheries Station, \$545,000, this is the first of the three years that the Ministry of Fisheries is

going to construct the Fisheries Station and the necessary works for Koro Fisheries Station. I know it has appeared in the past budgets of the Ministry but because there were issues regarding landowning units in Koro, that was the cause of the delay for the construction of the Koro Fisheries Station but all have been finalised and the project will take three years to be fully constructed and in operation. This year is the first of the three years.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I think I had a motion, I would like to withdraw that. That seeks clarification on the State's development.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Activity 6.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, Programme 2-6(8) - Food Security Programme - Freshwater Aquaculture Small-Holder Farmers (\$1 million). How effective is this programme and is \$1 million sufficient enough to cover all the small-holder farmers in aquaculture?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, because of the need to put less pressure on marine resources, the increase in funding is to cater for the increase in the demand for aquaculture farming around Fiji and also to ensure sustainable food security. So, this \$1 million is sufficient for the next financial year to cater for small-holder farmers.

HON. S. NAND.- Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forestry, is the distribution centres for aquaculture in all the divisions and easily accessible to all the farmers?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Yes, honourable Member, it is accessible to all.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, on the same SEG and on the same issue, the Food Security Programme for Freshwater Aquaculture, this is quite a large increase of around \$400,000 to go up to a million dollars. But one of the things that we have seen for aquaculture, is that a lot of these areas where we built these farms, especially the smallholders, is the issue of getting good feed for them. Is this just about digging up the ponds or also giving them some assistance so that they can produce fish that are well fed, so that they can be as productive as possible? Is it just about digging ponds or is it also looking at other things down the line to make the prawns as productive as possible?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Thank you, honourable Member, so it is not only about the digging up of the ponds, it is about the whole package. Apart from the ponds, the feed and other assistance that is provided by the Ministry and we have had an increase in demand from farmers who are intending to venture into aquaculture.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 2-6(8) - Construction of Multi Species Hatchery - Ra (\$781,038), can the honourable Minister clarify the amount of money that is allocated for this because this was part of a donor supported project?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation of \$781,038 for the Multi Species Hatchery in Ra is to cover wages and FNPF for project officers, fuel and oil, procurement, shrimp feed, visits and site inspection and construction of two new staff quarters.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I withdraw the motion that I had put in, now that she has said that it also includes the salary of staff and people that are working in that Hatchery. I thought it was just a direct assistance to progress the work that was carried out by the Government of Taiwan. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, we will now vote on Head 31 – Ministry of Fisheries.

Question put.

Head 31 was agreed to.

Head 32 – Ministry of Forestry

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments.

Programme 2-1?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman on Programme 2-1(6) under Fiji Pine Trust - Extension (\$1,745,102), an increase of around \$0.5 million. Can the honourable Minister explain the reason for the increase just for our information?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the increase is to cater for the following activities:

- (1) Administration;
- (2) Silviculture;
- (3) Utilisation Consultation;
- (4) Awareness Training and Business;
- (5) Review of processes and procedures;
- (6) Maritime Harvesting Operation Support; and
- (7) Capital Expenditure.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is related to Programme 2-1(5) – Annual Contribution- International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation. My question is whether any work is being undertaken by the Ministry of Forestry to develop this bamboo and rattan industry in Fiji?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.– Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable Member, you will notice there has been no change in the annual contribution from the previous financial year and the allocation was moved from SEG 6 to SEG 5 in line with the new budget classification structure. So, the provision of the annual subscription fee to the International Union of Forest Research Organization is to enhance the collaboration between countries on forest-related research and disseminates information to all partners that gradually contribute to decision-making and policies. This also allows to new research areas and findings.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.–Mr. Chairman, my question was whether we have developed a Bamboo and Rattan industry in Fiji? Any work has been undertaken by the Ministry of Forestry to develop a sector on bamboo and rattan?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. – Thank you, honourable Member and Mr. Chairman, the work on developing the bamboo sector is still in the process. The Ministry of Forestry is still looking at ways to develop the bamboo from the various species of bamboo that are available in Fiji.

MR. CHAIRMAN. – Thank you. I understand there are only three varieties in Fiji. Apart from Indonesia, they have several dozens of varieties. Anyway, they are still looking into it.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU. – Mr. Chairman, the item on SEG 6 has already been asked by honourable Usamate. The Minister has explained what is included in the amount of money that I wanted to discuss, so I will withdraw my motion on increasing this allocation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2?

HON. J. USAMATE. –Mr. Chairman, on SEG 7 - Emission Reduction Programme - Benefit Sharing Plan for the World Bank has a budget there of \$6.3 million which is an increase from \$4.1 million (if I am correct) from last year. For our information, can you inform us on the purpose of the increase and what are the benefits that are coming out of this beneficiary plan?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.–Mr. Chairman, the increase is to cater for the following activities; project administration, Alternative Livelihood Initiative Development, Capacity Building Training and Awareness, registered REDD plus conservation lease, Annual staff emoluments, the ten-district level integrated LUP, implementation of communication and participation plan, the securing of forest government stock and securing socket layer license. So, this is government's contribution to support Fiji's participation in the carbon financing mechanism under the World Bank, FCPF, Carbon Fund, REDD Plus readiness initiative to reduce emission from deforestations and forest decantation through the enhancement or establishment of forest government stock as syncs.

MR. CHAIRMAN. – Has the Ministry arrived at a formula in the sharing, especially to the resource owners?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU. – Mr. Chairman, Sir, its coming soon.

HON. J. USAMATE.- On the next SEG – 8 Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD Plus) of \$1.2 million, that is also a \$400,000 increase. Can you just illuminate us on what that is for and the reason for the increase?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, she has already explained that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, the first one was on SEG 7, this is now on SEG 8.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation is a cash grant from the World Bank that supports carbon trade. The processes, systems and institutional arrangements are clearly articulated in the Emission Reduction Programme.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think you have given the answer to my first question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We have a motion on Programme 2-7(9). The two motions are from honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, maybe I just start off asking for the clarification from the honourable Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Are these the two motions that you have withdrawn again?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Or it has just arrived on the table?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. It is on SEG 9 and SEG 10?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Yes.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, maybe I should just ask the honourable Minister for clarification and if that is clarified then I may withdraw the motion. I just needed clarification on those two figures on Programme 2-7(9) - Maritime Pine Development (\$700,000) and SEG 10 - Commercial Maritime Pine Subsidy (\$2,141,810). I would like to ask the honourable Minister to clarify and explain the difference between SEG 9 and SEG 10?

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Chairman, the increase in Maritime Pine Development is to cater for the following expenses: salary, wages, transfer and allowance, vehicle repairs and maintenance, saw milling timber treatment and marketing. That allocation is for those purpose.

The Commercial Maritime Pine Subsidy is to cater for re-barge and boat fare from subsidy of logs and timber from Kadavu and Lakeba, the construction of new jetty, the roading subsidy, outsourcing of portable saw milling and treatment, vehicle purchasing and staff recruitment. I hope that is clear, honourable Member.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, that clarifies that these are two distinctive items, so I would like to withdraw the motion that I had put up.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 32.

Question put.

Head 32 agreed to.

Head 33 – Ministry of lands and Mineral Resources

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments. Programme 2-1?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, on Programme 2-1, I will go straight to SEG 9 - Purchase of Research Vessel. If the honourable Minister can elaborate further on this project, please.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, the purchase of technical equipment, there is an increase of \$167,180. This is just a holdover from the last financial year. So, we have not completed with the purchases.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- My question is specifically on the research vessel.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- SEG 9?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, SEG 9, please.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, the Department of Mineral Resources' research vessel, the drawings are presently being vetted by MSAF. It is being constructed in Australia. Payments have already been made. Sir, \$97,000 is the retention fee. We are hoping that the vessel is going to be handed over to us between September and October and if it sails well in the retention period, then we will make the final payment of \$97,000.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, a supplementary question; honourable Minister, if you can just be more specific on the technical work that will be undertaken by this vessel because I

know previously there has been some discussions too with the Ministry for Defence with the capability in the Naval Division. So, this is where my supplementary question is coming from.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that query. The Mineral Resources Department used to have a research vessel, that has now been boarded, so this is the replacement for that vessel. It is mostly used for mineral exploration, geological mapping within the Fiji Waters. The vessel will also supplement the works of the Divisions in environmental monitoring, groundwater assessment, seismic monitoring, earthquakes and tsunami awareness outreach to rural and maritime islands. It will also be used to assist the Marine Geology Section to undertake coastal assessments.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Your first boat was the *Tovuto*.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- The first boat was the *Tovuto* and still working.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Honourable Minister, in SEG 8 – Ground Assistance Programme – Small Islands, there has been a substantive drop of \$250,000 whereas for the large islands, a big increase of around \$2.5 million. Can you please give us some more information on the reasons for that and what that will cover, especially from the large islands?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, that is to coincide with target of 18 boreholes that have previously been targeted that had already been assessed in the previous year and that we are intending to provide for them in this coming financial year. But this is also in addition to the special provision that we have built in for what we have announced in the budget, which is an addition of \$5 million for the development of 1,700 boreholes throughout Fiji in the next few years. So, the target is 200 for the small islands, 500 for Vanua Levu and 1,000 for Viti Levu. So, this one that you see on SEG 8 is really to accommodate. For the ones that had already been assessed and which they have identified that they are capable of developing that Ground Water System in the next financial year.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just one final question on Programme 2-1(8) - Upgrade and Enhancement - National Tsunami Warning Centre (\$300,000). I see honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources that this is probably a new allocation on the upgrade and enhancement of the National Tsunami Warning Centre. If the honourable Minister can just elaborate on this project and what impact this will bring because I know that we already have a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Policy and early warning systems is part of our commitment to the Sendai Framework. So, I acknowledge the Government for this initiative, and it would be good if the Parliament can be enlightened on this project?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the \$300,000 is to cater for the construction or the extension of the existing building where the Seismology Section is at Delainabua. The place where it is at the moment is quite restricted. The demand and the volume of work that is required of the section, of course, of its importance requires a further extension to the current building but the \$300,000 is simply for the building.

The Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources with South Pacific Commission (SPC) through UNESCO is going to outfit. When the building is finished, they are going to outfit it with equipment that is necessary to compliment the equipment that we presently have at the Seismology Section.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Just a supplementary question, honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, I know probably there has always been issues too about our buoys that are placed in the various locations. Probably this is something, I know that Fiji has been in the past also requested if they can start looking at additional so that we can cover most of the approaches. I just wanted to raise this with you and maybe if it is already in the plans of the Ministry as well. It is still related to tsunami.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, with these areas of technicalities, of course, as you would understand, we have a very close collaboration with SPC and UNESCO. These are the two partners that we look to, to develop for us and also train for us personnels and also to maintain and expand equipment that we have on the ground.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I see that under SEG 7 there is public consultation review of the mining law. I believe that is in relation to the Mining Act which has been under review for two to three years now. Is this now the final round of review or is it an interim part of the process to coming out with the amended Mining Act.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, we would have a preference that this would be the final phase of it before it is brought to Cabinet. I think we will make an effort to make sure that this is brought to Cabinet and ultimately brought to Parliament within the next financial year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The review of the lands legislation began in Qarase's government's time.

Programme 3-2?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir on SEG 8 in relation to the Geodetic Datum, I know this has been underway for a considerable amount of time now and I think a lot of work has been done and I congratulate the Ministry for doing that. Now that we have this upgrade and enhancement of the datum of \$161,000, is this also going to lead to the conclusion of this exercise or this is also just part of the process towards the eventual completion later on?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, this allocation is going to cover for the maintenance of the eight existing core stations that we have. They are in need of upgrading and maintenance, so with this allocation of \$161,290, we hope that these eight core stations are going to be maintained and kept in conditions that would continue to feed us with strong and reliable cadastral survey and network mapping coordinates that can be used by all Fijians.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- These geodetic datum act as survey control as well?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Indeed, Mr. Chairman.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on Programme 3-2(8), I note that you also have a similar allocation to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs on the Survey of Mahogany Plantations?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, this is just to also bring some clarity on the division of funding that you would have seen in honourable Vasu's Ministry funding yesterday and the one today. So, you will see that the concentration of the \$382,000 for this year is to attempt to put a closure on Nukurua and Sawakasa woodlots.

We have completed Galoa and Naboutini and we have aging mahogany woodlots in Fiji. So, with the limited number of surveyors and survey teams that we have, the big task that we also have, we have agreed that the surveyors from Ministry of iTaukei and Fisheries Commission are going to be also useful to us in attempting to start with the woodlots that are at Vanua Levu.

This is all with the intent to ensuring that we can round up and put this in our knapsack as having these woodlots surveyed so that Fiji Hardwood can then go on and take proper leases on all of these woodlots with all of the survey boundaries demarcated.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I am thankful for the centralisation and to speed up this work but I think the frustrations that usually come from the landowners is which one is official when it comes to the co-ordination after the work has been done? Probably the agencies can just work on these and maybe the Ministry of Lands becomes the official whatever because these are the issues on the ground when trying to settle these disputes.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- We understand Mr. Chairman the ground difficulties that are faced with all of the surveys. We have surveyors up in the Northern Division who are also going to be assisting the iTLFC surveyors when they are up in Vanua Levu. Ultimately, all of these comes back to the Survey General's Office who will do the verification before everything is finalised.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I would be interest to see the work done in Naboutini as you mentioned honourable Minister because that particular *Tikina* of Nuku has not been surveyed by the Native Lands Commission as yet. Now, I just heard the survey for the mahogany plantations has been undertaken.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- In Naboutini, Mr. Chairman, there are nine leased lots with 4,921 hectares and six of their plans were submitted for checking and approval and they have been with the Survey-General's Office.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-3?

HON. J. USAMATE.- On SEG 4 – Lease and Rent (Renewals) - iTaukei Lands (\$3.845 million), an increase of \$300,000. Can the honourable Minister just provide some information on that?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, yes, there is a market increase. We are looking at some 537 active leases of iTaukei leased to the State. We have been going between the Ministry of Lands and iTLTB in trying to make sure that we are crunch down on the right number. So, over the years we have had discussions with iTLTB and also this honourable Member also takes care of the rental increases that do happen every five years. So, when those five years fall, we also have to make sure that the increase that needs to be paid is factored into the budget.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just a follow-up question, Mr. Chairman. On the next one, the Lease and Rent (Renewals) which has also increased by around \$60,000, will that explanation be the same for this increase?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- This is for the renewal of leases that are up for renewal. Those ones are for the active leases, this one is for the renewal of any of the ones that we are going to negotiate with iTLTB.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Sir, can I just ask a general question to the honourable Minister through you and may be you can help in this as well, although it is not in any of the SEGs, this is

about the work of the Valuation Board. I know that we have had a lot of difficulty in the past because of the membership because it is related to ALTA as well, Sir, when it comes to non-active agriculture leases. I just want to raise a general question to the honourable Minister because in the previous sitting of Parliament we have talked about ALTA. I have gone to CEO iTLTB and I think they are bringing that up to Cabinet. This is why I just wanted to ask the question on the Valuation Board and the role that they play. How is it being handled now in the Ministry because it will be important for the primary industry stakeholders?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, the Board is now properly constituted as well as the ALTA Valuation Board. Those Board members have been appointed and they are continuing on with the work that is required of them in examining and also passing valuers who have applied to be registered. So, they have been continuing on with the work that they have been asked to do.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- It is a bit long explanation, Sir, given the way the Valuation Board has been subjected to other, like this real estate people, coming in by virtue of them doing real estate sales, automatically they become part of this valuation institute without really undergoing the necessary studies. So that was something that we experienced for some time.

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- I must also mention, Mr. Chairman, that the Evaluation Act is also presently being consulted and reviewed. We are anticipating that the new Act will be prompt to time and address the concerns that we now have as opposed to the archaic concerns that the present Evaluation Act has.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-4.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is on SEG 8 – Upgrade and Enhancement - Subdivisions. I would like to ask the honourable Minister which divisions will be upgraded?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr. Chairman, through you, in the Central/Eastern, we are going to work at the Cautata Agricultural Subdivisions, Muanaweni Agricultural Subdivision on drainage and road maintenance. In the North also \$100,000 allocation for demolishing of existing footpaths and v-drains, construction of new footpaths that were constructed on a plan M2O09 and also \$100,000 in the Western Division and that is going to be for the construction of a retaining wall on the transmitter road in Nadi.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-5.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Through you, Sir, honourable Minister, SEG 10 - Land Bank Investment. I see this is an increase of around \$123,000, can you just give us an idea of what is entailed in that budget?

HON. F.W.R. VOSAROGO.- Mr Chairman, this is to complete the compensation payment for road access to designated land in *Mataqali* Koronikula which had been pending from 2014.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 33 – Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources.

Question put.

Head 33 agreed to.

Head 34 - Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now for any comments and will go straight into the items - Programme 1-1.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is on SEG 8 - Standardised Roadside Stalls. Last year \$100,000 was allocated and only \$13,000 was used. So, honourable Minister if you can explain why the full sum was not used and this year, we are allocating another \$80,000?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, basically what we have subsequently found with regard to the roadside stalls is, we have a bit of an issue with the roadside stalls. Just by way of update, there is a lot of stalls that are actually vacant. For example, out of the 90-plus stalls that were inspected in 2022, about 30-plus are vacant, so we have decided to slow down the spend just to try and understand what we can do to redeploy. So, this year, we will try and move the stalls around and just try and understand why the request comes for stalls we try and assist and then they did not use the stalls. So, that is really the reason why we had to slow down, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 4-1.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 4-1(10) - Co-operative Development Grant. I will be grateful if the honourable Minister could elaborate more on this - what this grant is for and its availability?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the grant is actually a new grant, Sir, and it is really driven by, if you like, a better understanding of how we can continue to assist particularly in terms of economic empowerment. I have discovered that in other countries, they have actually used co-operatives as a major weapon to drive SDG initiatives.

This is our first attempt to actually try and boost the funding to co-operatives and, hopefully, over the next few years, we will actually increase the funding because we are now actively encouraging across all the Ministries a creation of co-operative and so the funding is really to try and assist.

The initial plan is to try and assist co-operatives that request for assistance, and it leads up to a maximum of \$100,000, but it will just depend on the quantum of requests that come in, in terms of assistance, Sir.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is quite a good initiative but the only concern is, if it is at the Ministry's disposal for funding co-operatives, why is it under 'R'?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, from our perspective, like even last year, we had \$40 million under 'R' for the rebates, but we utilise all of it. So, it is really just a matter of applying one's self properly in terms of the Ministry to ensure the funds come, so a bit of pre-planning is involved. I suppose because it is new as well, maybe the Ministry of Finance wants to make sure the money goes to the right place, but that is alright. It certainly will not be in slowdown in the spending of the grant. Requests are coming in already.

One of the things that we have all done now across the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, we are all saying and encouraging the creation of co-operatives across all like-minded industry. I think that will be the way forward in terms of trying to develop the sector, particularly agriculture.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Probably, it acts as a kind of control on this.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Yes, it is a new grant, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 5-1?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Honourable Minister, Programme 5-1(10), across the board with respect to the YES, IHRDP, NDP, the National Export Strategy and the TEP, there has pretty much been an increase for all of them, which is commendable, but I see that there is a substantial decrease with respect to the Northern Development Programme (NDP). Is there any specific reason behind the decrease for the NDP, considering we are trying to encourage more and more in terms of diversification and also in terms of the North? You can give us a reason as to why there is a substantial decrease on NDP?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, in terms of the overall utilisation of the grant last year, I think it was a bit of a slowdown in the grant so we have tried to apply the grant in other areas where there has been over utilisation and so that is, I think, the main driver, but overall, we have gone from \$2.6 million to \$4 million. So, there is enough money in there to cover for other purposes. I think overall, we are pretty good in terms of the money. Like I have mentioned, there is \$120 million circulating in the whole SME space between all the Ministries, including the Ministry of Sugar.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, while still on Programme 5-1(10) - National Export Strategy. Honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, I noted the slight increase in National Export Strategy. I did discuss this with you after last year's Budget and you have increased it by only \$200,000. My question is, how flexible are we in terms of assisting others who have been assisted previously?

We have visited a few lately in my tours around Fiji and they want to expand so that we can facilitate more, particularly the exporters, but they are saying, "I went to the Ministry and they said, 'you have been assisted before.' How flexible is this honourable Minister? Because these are the people that can create the impact as well.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I guess as a Government because there are a lot of requests so once a request is done, we have given them a couple of years before they get back in the queue. So, what I suggest is you refer them to me because sometimes normally, they tend to ready for other forms of assistance through FDB or other things. So, they may not need another grant but they can certainly get concessionary loans or that kind of thing. So, it is double the amount, so it is very healthy.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Sir. It is still not enough the amount that he has given.

(Laughter)

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 6-1?

HON. A. BIA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, honourable Minister for Trade, Co-operatives, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications, I stand to be corrected on SEG7 - Digital Fiji. I believe that is a new allocation of \$1,000,000. Please, elaborate more on the work that will be carried out under this allocation.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, the two components to the funding, because we are building out the new ease of doing business platform so there will be annual subscription fees paid for the licensing. So that is one component.

The second component is because of the high turnover. We are not paying enough to our IT guys so there is a bit of a risk with the high turnover. So, what we have tried to do is actually get some coverage from offshore, from the vendor, just to make sure that we do have adequate coverage, so that we do not put our information systems at risk.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 34 – Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Communications.

Question put.

Head 34 agreed to.

Head 35 – Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Programme 1-1(10) – Sugarcane Development and Farmers Assistance (\$4,000,000). Again, this is welcomed but it is time that we look at the return in investment, particularly on production levels.

I noted in the last Annual Report Sir, particularly for Vanua Levu, they are still hitting around 600,000 tonnes. Vanua Levu used to produce almost triple that amount during the good days, so honourable Minister, what assurance can you give us in terms of improved productivity?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, there is a saying that if a lion is sleeping, let him sleep. If you wake the lion up, you are in trouble.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Who is the lion?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I am the lion Sir. It is called Singh is lion. Anyway, it is most humorous here now because you are too serious. The Budget will be passed anyway, so let us laugh about it.

(Honourable Members interject)

Listen, support...

HON. P.K. BALA.- You are wasting our time.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- No, you are wasting my time. Mr. Chairman, I would like to say, before I answer to the honourable Leader of the Opposition, this morning I had two documents in hand which came to me as the Minister. One was a document that money was paid to Abdul Khan's friend...

(Honourable Members interject)

No, let me complete, \$100,000 just for a change of a logo of FSC. After I am done with the abuse then I will come to the use. Number two, Graham Clarke's brother was paid \$8,000 business class ticket on FSC's expenses. These are the misuse, now I will come to the use of it.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition, I will tell you, yes, the production of sugar has decreased since 2006. There were some issues of land leases, there were some issues otherwise, but collectively, as the Opposition usually alluded in their speech, we want to increase the production.

Vanua Levu, at one good time had 1.2 million tonnes of cane, today it now stands at 600,000 tonnes. We have this programme in hand and together with the Opposition and bipartisan, we would like to see that we all work together to increase the production in the next 10 years and that is why we have this plan.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Chairman, Programme 1-1(10) - Cane Access Roads with an allocation of \$4 million. I would just like the honourable Minister to clarify because along these cane access roads, we have some small crossings or low-lying crossings that also need repair and maintenance. Are those also included in that allocation of \$4 million?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, through you, last year, we had \$2 million and now, it increased to \$4 million. That just shows that we are very serious about getting the cane access roads done.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, I would like to make one comment in regards to the Sugar Industry. After looking at both programmes, I do not see there is any allocation for the rebuilding of the Penang Sugar Mill. We all know very well that a number of times, this Minister has repeatedly said in this Parliament that come this time next year, the Mill will be ready. So, since there is no allocation, what does he have to say on this?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the honourable Member, during tea break asked me why there was no allocation. I told him that this programme has an operational budget and we are looking at donor funds.

This is not a management project, it is a \$150 million project. Your Government has destroyed the Mill. You destroyed the Mill and now we are going to bring it back.

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, that means the honourable Minister can come and say anything in Parliament and later on shy away from it?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- No shame! You had asked me a question in the Tea Room, and I answered you. Rakiraki Mill will be done, it will be done, and that is it.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, before I get into the question, I have an observation. Until now, discussions have been very cordial, and all of a sudden comes a Minister who absolutely has no idea on how to behave in this Parliament, and starts shouting. It disrupts the entire Parliamentary process. Why can he not start behaving for a change?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- It is the way I speak, Mate! It is called criticism.

HON. S. NAND.- He probably needs a couple of doses.

Mr. Chairman, in Programme 1-1(10) – Cage Bins (\$1 million). Is this facility available to private contractors who cart cane so that they can have better cage bins, or is it for FSC? I just need an explanation, Mr. Chairman. If the facility is available to private contractors, how can they access this facility?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, this is only for FSC's tramline facility. .

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I still have honourable Bala and the honourable Leader of the Opposition with their questions. I have a motion here from honourable Koroilavesau. Please, introduce your motion, honourable Member.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, I understand, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move:

That SEG 10 be reduced by \$11 million.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, you may elaborate on your motion.

HON S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs have made a lengthy deliberation on FSC. I think during my Budget Speech, I had stated that we need a whole workout on the sugar industry in Fiji, carrying on as we have been carrying on as we have been carrying on since the Colonial days. We will never be able to reach the effort that we want to take sugar to, so that it will be self-sustainable.

One of the huge issues that is causing a lot of cost to Fiji is the transportation of cane from cane farms to the mill. Not only the cost in fuel and the expenses in the carrying in trucks, the damage that it does on our roads is huge and substantial. My view is that instead of allocating all these funds to the various headings here, we should start. There was a study that was made that it will cost \$30 million to revamp our rail system that will carry sugar cane to our mills. We should start, we should make an initiative to put it into the programme and initiate this.

Mr. Chairman, \$30 million is nothing if we think about the damages that are happening on our roads, the rubbish that is created by all the cane that is carried on the road, I think it is about time that we re-dedicate the funding that we have to make sure there is a long term solution to the sugar industry.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- This is reduce the budget by \$11 million.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, we have been talking to this company called Rites Limited in India recently. They are the experts in the railway system and they are coming back to Fiji to assist us in assessing the railway system. Once they give us a report and the costing, then we will come back to the Cabinet and the Government for assistance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, I do not think we support that motion. What it simply means is, I think the rail issue, honourable Koroilavesau is 100 percent correct. The rail system was built over many years, it should never have been allowed to be destroyed. It was destroyed in the last 10 years or 15 years. Now we are in a situation where the cost of cartage and the cost addition to the farmers is a single biggest contributor, which has drained away their income. If you reduce the \$11 million, you are essentially saying, reduce subsidy, reduce cane planting programmes and reduce all the cane access roads.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The FSC is another entity; this is not funding FSC. This is looking at farm level production. While we consider options, funding, studies on drain and I think that is a good suggestion, we cannot allow the farmers to get out of the industry now. This

programme really is in SEG10 is to keep the farmers. If we had not lost the European Union funding in 2006, there were three components; milling, farm level and alternative livelihood. So we lost about \$300 million to \$400 million and the decline on the industry was just certain. I think we looked at it very carefully when we were discussing with the Ministry that this funding is required.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I thank the two honourable Ministers for their explanations. I think I just add on, the future cost of keeping the trucks, maintained and the diesel that is being spent on it, the rail can be used during off season and during season to carry containers between our destinations on top of carrying cane during the cane season. It can be a double edge effort in creating and reducing traffic within our roads and damage to the infrastructure. In that case, Mr. Chairman, I would like to withdraw my motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. You still want to raise your question? The motion has been withdrawn.

HON. S. NAND.- Not on the motion. I have a question.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Question from honourable Sachida Nand.

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, again going back to the cage bins, thank you to the honourable Minister for explaining but cage bins are for collecting canes from mechanical harvesters. So, is the honourable Minister telling us that mechanical harvested canes will be collected in rail carts and carried to the mill, is that what his trying to tell us?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, yes cage bins as you know are very secured, it does not spill out the canes when it goes on the tracks. We are trying to bring in more cage bins now so that the farmers do not get there, canes off track and offloaded on the way. We are totally concentrating on giving more cage bins rather than the open carts.

HON. S. NAND.- Will that be for carrying mechanical harvested cane?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You are correct.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG10 - FSC Working Capital Support (\$15 million), if the honourable Minister can elaborate what FSC is going to do with this money. Is it cooperation or some other activities. What is the intent of this fund?

HON. P.K. BALA.- He does not know.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I know, I know, I will need to explain.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is the repayment for the EXIM Bank. You know the history of Exim Bank and how we have come to that. Through the Indian Government we were able to negotiate a deal where the interest that was due and future interest is being taken care of by the Indian Government, and so the payment schedule for the next three years, and obviously FSC does not have the funding to do that, so we are allocating that to clear off the Exim Bank loan.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- For how many more years are we going to pay this amount to the Exim Bank? I mean I know this year we are putting in \$15 million and what are your plans for the future?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is one-of allocation and we are hoping that FSC itself will take care of whatever is left over.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, may I just refer to the honourable Minister's initial statement in responding to my first question. Talking about the sleeping lion, he is admitting that he was sleeping on the job, Mr. Chairman.

(Laughter)

So, I will ask the honourable Prime Minister through you Mr. Chairman, Sir, to sack the sleeping Minister.

(Laughter)

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, I was referring to the sleeping Minister then but I am a sleeping lion. There is a difference between a Minister and a sleeping lion.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG 10. I note the significant increase, almost doubled on the cane access road. This is welcomed because they need it, Mr. Chairman, Sir, and increase of \$2 million. Does this mean that there are new farmers, new areas that we are getting into because it is quite a significant increase and, of course, I know that there needs to be maintenance as well in the existing farms. And still the question on railways, that is critical to the farmers? Will part of this allocation go towards improvement in the rails?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation for last year, we gave \$2 million, we found out that it was very less for the cane access roads, the contractors, the prices of machines and hiring of plants were very excessive. So that is how we managed to convince the Ministry of Finance to increase the budget to \$4 million but that does not include any existing railway system. That is going to be taken care of as soon as we get a report, we find out what is the cost of repairing and putting new rails.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I will start from SEG 1 on Personal Emoluments. Last year it was \$533,000, this year we can see a huge jump and that is \$742,713. Can the honourable Minister justify this increase and please behave when answering?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, look I do not control the emoluments. There is a Ministry, and appointments are there. There were a lot of vacancies that has now been filled and this is because your government did not fill them. We have to bring this sugar industry back to its feet and this is why we need workers, we do not need statues.

HON. P.K. BALA.- I am quite sure this industry is going to collapse under this Minister. Mr. Chairman, how many more staff they have got in this financial year?

HON. OPPOSITON MEMBER.- He does not know.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Who does not know? You do not know your job.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is dependent on my Permanent Secretary, and he tells me. I do not control the number of staff in the Ministry, but I want to control them to do work, that is all. Whoever comes in, they have to perform.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I can answer the question for the honourable Member. The increase honourable Member is additional salary for the honourable Minister, the re-alignment in salary of the multi-ethnic component about \$231,000, additional FNPF, overtime plus also the salary

of 14 established staff. So, because of the Multi-Ethnic part of the Ministry, fully established that is an additional staff and the increase in salaries is catered for.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, I think what the honourable Minister for Finance has just said, that is also being allocated under the Multi-Ethnic Affairs.

Going to SEG 7, last year \$187,000 was given for the Sugar Cane Growers Council Election. I would like to ask the honourable Minister what that money was used for and now we see another \$200,000 allocated for that? So are we going to have elections or what are these funds for?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, last year we announced that the elections is going to take place therefore we had budgeted \$187,000 but there was this submission to the Elections Office, Solicitor-General's Office for approval and to get a new regulation and laws changed; it took time. We could not utilise the \$187,000 then. Now because the elections is going to happen this year, we have made this new provision. So, that \$187,000 was never used because we are still going through the process, the process that your government had delayed during your time.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, can you ask him to stop referring to what we did, what we

HON. C.J. SINGH.- No, I want to remind you.

HON. P.K. BALA.- If I am going to start, he will be a sorry man.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- You can start.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Honestly, Mr. Chairman, Sir.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Because you are going to jail.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Please, he needs to behave.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- If I start, you are going to jail.

HON. P.K. BALA.- This is not his supermarket, this is Parliament.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- I have a right to say.

HON. P.K. BALA.- SEG 10, Mr. Chairman, so in other words he has confirmed that they are going to conduct the Sugar Cane Growers Elections; that is fine. SEG 10 - Sugar Cane Development and Farmers Assistance has been reduced to \$1 million. Can the honourable Minister explain the reason for the reduction?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- There has been an assessment done by the FSC and they have said that this money is sufficient, so be it.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- We will move on.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Programme 1-1(10) New Farmers and Lease Premium Assistance last year, the allocation was \$2 million and in this fiscal year, it is \$1 million. Can the honourable Minister advise us on how many leases were issued last year amounting to \$2 million and how many leases will be issued this year amounting to \$1 million?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, we have renewed 300 leases last year and based on the figures given to me, we only have about 150 leases, so that will probably take care of with the \$1 million.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted a clarification from the Minister on Cane Harvest and the Utilisation of Corrections Service personnel as highlighted in SEG 7 costing \$320,000.

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, there is an ongoing programme by the Ministry to re-engage the prisoners to come and harvest and that is the amount that was basically being told by the Corrections Service that they will require so that is the amount that we allocated.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have one question, Sir, on Programme 2-1(7). There is a new allocation of \$500,000 for Special Advisory Committee. I note the District Advisory Councillors in Head 18 with an allocation of \$767,960. Can the honourable Minister elaborate more on this Special Advisory Committee? What will be their role and what is the component as well because the Advisory Councillors are already in Head 18?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Mr. Chairman, I had discussed with the honourable Prime Minister about transferring the Advisory Councillors under my Ministry which he has endorsed and it will come through Cabinet, so once that has happened, then obviously we will take care of paying these Advisory Councillors through our Ministry.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, these are two different issues. The District Advisory Councillors are already in Head 18 and if they are transferred to your Ministry, that will come with the allocation, but you have this \$500,000. I am asking about this new allocation of \$500,000.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I can clarify that. I think the Minister was partly right. Because you asked the question about advisory, he answered the advisory question but this advisory committee, this is the discussion that we had when the Ministry requested this allocation. It is a new allocation, it is supposed to be a Special Committee consisting of inter-agency representatives, government ministries, religious leaders who will meet every month to identify issues within the communities, particularly land and other issues, conflicts, tolerance. This Committee is supposed to then advise the Minister. It was part of the recommendation of the review and the recommendation from the Committee that was supported by the New Zealand Government. So, this is an initiative out of those recommendations.

It is a new allocation. It could be one-off allocation, depending on what the Committee does in this financial year. So, this is separate from the Advisory Councillors, whose purpose is for rural development and other activities.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, now, it has been clarified that Special Advisory Committee is not the Advisory Councillors allocation.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No.

HON. P.K. BALA.- So, it is not partly right, it is fully wrong.

(Laughter)

Mr. Chairman, Sir, going back to SEG 7 – Language, Culture and Arts (\$2.2 million), who are the beneficiaries of this allocation?

HON. C.J. SINGH.- First of all, through you, Mr. Chairman, I want him to learn about culture and arts as a member of Sangam. This allocation will help and teach you the culture and arts in this country.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, I take those comments as offence. As I have said earlier on, he needs to behave.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- You are becoming like a bloody market now.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Come on, let us behave like adults here. We do not want to go into this kind of exchanges. Hold on, honourable Minister. I hope you understand that.

Parliament will now vote on Head 35 – Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs and Sugar Industry.

Question put.

Head 35 agreed to.

Head 37- Ministry of Local Government

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is open for any comments. Programme 1-2?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 7 – Special Administrators. Are we going to continue paying the illegally appointed Special Administrators?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, can I ask the honourable Member to rephrase and repeat his question, please.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, you all will recall that I mentioned in this Parliament few things that some of the Administrators that have been appointed is illegal and here there is an allocation to pay them. What I am saying is, are we going to continue to pay the taxpayers' money pay to these illegal appointment of the Special Administrators?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Before I respond, Mr. Chairman, I think he needs to look at himself in the mirror first before he asks this question. This allocation is amounted to \$7,000 and \$4,000 will continue because we have appointed these Special Administrators in all the 13 Municipalities in Fiji. We have gone through the consultative process before they were appointed and the Ministry will continue to pay them.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, at least, I have heard this respond for the first time. On SEG 10 - Completion of Govind Park, Ba (\$2,000,000). Some months ago, Mr. Chairman, the honourable Minister was in Ba and he has signed an agreement of around \$8 million. It was also mentioned that those two projects will be completed by the end of December. What I am wondering is, the cost is around \$8 million, the allocation here is \$2 million, so where is the honourable Minister is going to get the balance of the money from?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, the honourable Member is right, there was a contract signed for Phase 2 of the Govind Park project to a tune of \$8 million and the timeline, according to the work schedule, as well as the contractor is around February of next year. That is just the timeline.

The allocation that we have here is because after a lapse of two years, then we have this project again and the view of the Ministry of Finance is that allocation should be enough. That will be based on some of the projects that have been undertaken because that has not been completed to whatever it was projected for. Even it was going to be done according to the phases, the Ministry of Finance is looking forward also into assisting the Ministry in paying out whatever amount will be needed to complete the project.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on SEG 7 - Special Administrators (\$764,000). I note that the allowance of Special Administrators has increased from \$392,000 to \$764,000, which is 100 percent. Can the honourable Minister explain this increase?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, the allocation for Special Administrators is based on the numbers that we have. That is worked up to the end of the next financial year, and even before the determination of the Local Government Election date. As I have said, it is based on the numbers that we have already appointed. Some have already been terminated because of their inability to attend meetings. So, the full amount will not be utilised.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, the Special Administrator cost has really gone up and the taxpayers are paying for it. I am saying it has increased by 100 percent, but it has doubled. Instead of cutting cost, we are increasing costs, and this is one area where we could have cut costs.

My next question is on SEG 10 - Completion of Lautoka Swimming Pool (\$1,500,000). Last year, \$4 million was allocated to this particular project. If you can tell us whether that money was used? If it was, great, but if it was not, then I can see, only \$1.5 million is allocated for this year. What do you intent to do with \$1.5 million?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, before I answer the second part of the question on swimming pool, the reason why there is also my explanation earlier on, on the increase in the budgetary allocation for Special Administrators is, I think everyone needs to understand that we have appointed Special Administrators for all the 13 Municipalities around the country.

In the previous Administration, they have clustered some of the Councils but here, we have appointed Special Administrators for all the 13 Municipalities. So, there is a reason why the allocation increased.

Also, moving to the Swimming Pool, there were lot of misunderstanding on why the swimming pool was never completed. The Lautoka City Council has that contractual arrangement with the contractors so they were in a position to work on that particular project.

For the first six months of this financial year, the Ministry through the Lautoka City Council, was just trying to finalise some of the legal issues regarding the works that were not completed by the two contractors, as well as the Project Managers. So, that has already been taken care of.

Now, the amount allocated for this financial year is to assist the Ministry, as well as the Council, in looking at the project together after the appointment of the Project Manager, which he has already been through the tender evaluation process. So, once that is finalised, then it will be up to the Project Manager to review the whole project again. So, based on whatever amount that we

have, we are confident that there will be some rescoping of the whole project, so they will be able to maintain and complete the project at a very minimal cost.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-1?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I thought I was given a chance to ask a question after honourable Bala for Activity 2. Are you still giving me that or you have passed?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- I will allow that.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you for giving me the opportunity, Mr. Chairman. Sir, SEG 10 - National Fire Authority Capital Grant of \$6.1 million, can the honourable Minister elaborate on this, knowing that in the 2023-2024 Budget, it was allocated \$2.5 million but there was zero utilisation, nothing was done. How will the honourable Minister react on that?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, let me clarify first the \$6.1 million that was allocated to the National Fire Authority through the capital grant.

Now, this \$6.1 million allocation is the Government's 25 percent contribution towards the National Fire Authority's Annual Budget, as clearly stipulated in the National Fire Services Act. This will be release to the Authority in the normal quarterly instalments for the financial year. Rightfully this \$6.1 million should be part of the operational expenditure for National Fire Authority.

HON. V. NATH.- Supplementary question, Mr. Chairman; it is written here 'capital grant', but the honourable Minister is saying it is operational as well, so I feel that, that needs to be corrected. The second part which I asked was that in the 2023-2024 budget, they were given \$2.1 million, there was zero utilization, why?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA. – On that \$2.25 million that was allocated for this current financial year, the first project is for the construction of the new Navua Fire Station of \$1.3 million and the work that has been completed is physical progress, civil works and fencing which has been 100 percent completed. Phase II which is the construction of the project itself is 52 percent completion rate.

The next one is on the purchase of replacement of fire trucks and ambulances of around \$800,000. The procurement contract has been signed and the relevant procurement process is in progress.

The last one is on the maintenance, as well as repair and upgrading of Levuka Fire Station (\$400,000) and for that one, it is 89 percent completed. The project should be completed by 21st July, 2024, which is the current month.

MR. CHAIRMAN. – Thank you. We will now move on. Programme 2 – 1?

HON. P.D. KUMAR. –Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG7 – Urban Policy Action Plan Implementation. As far as I am aware of for this particular Action Plan, it has expired. So, I do not understand what is the implementation, is it the implementation of the old plan or are you reviewing or developing a new plan?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- We are developing a new plan, honourable Member.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.— Thank you.

My next question is related to the Town Planning Law Review - \$10,000 is allocated to that. The Town Planning Act was already reviewed, along with the Subdivision Act. If you can tell us how this money will be utilized in that context?

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, when I took office, I think this was something that I strongly believe needs to be reviewed - the Town Country Planning Act. There was also a paper that was submitted to Cabinet, I think around 2021, and I am told that we need things with SG's Office, something that we need to review again. I had a meeting with the Town Country Planning Advisory Committee and they still feel that there is a need for us to review and go through the papers again. And if there is a need for us to review, then we need to do more consultations before we can come up with the final review of that Act.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. – Thank you, honourable Minister, much appreciated. Can you assure us whether these two legislations will come to Parliament this year because the work was done, as I said, and it was done through a very wide consultation. Even all the past Directors were called to give their views on that particular piece of legislation. In fact, even an expert from Australia gave her opinion on the legislation. So, I think the consultation was very widely done and maybe just about 10 percent or 5 percent of the work is done. Can you please bring that legislation to this Parliament, thank you?

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you. I caution you to be careful with those kinds of leading questions. If you are so sure that you can bring the two legislations as stated by honourable Premila Kumar, then I urge you to answer. Otherwise, you just take that as kind of a statement coming from her to you.

HON. M.K. NALUMISA.- Mr. Chairman, I need to first take it through Cabinet before I can confirm the dates.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 37 – Ministry of Local Government.

Question put.

Head 37 agreed to.

Head 38 – Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for any comments. Programme 1-1?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, this is to do with Programme 1-1(10) Tourism Fiji - Marketing Grant. In light of the fact that we may face some lesser activity in the tourism industry, which is being predicted, is this a sufficient marketing grant to cover not just our traditional areas like Australia and New Zealand or are we looking at some other places in and around Asia like in China, India, et cetera. Is that sufficient to cover that also? Are we doing that to ensure that we do not lose out because they are our higher spending tourists? Will that cover it?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, the tourism industry up to the end of June is 8 percent ahead of last year; last year was a record year. In tourism, if make the first six months comfortably, the next six months should be, normal the high seasons, so we are riding comfortably now going forward. Indeed, the way we are going, there is no more low season or high season in tourism. It is only high-end soldier. One of the honourable Members had expressed that the forwards are weakening. This is driven largely by, that the inventory in the country is maxed. They can no longer find rooms, hence the low pickup going forward.

It behoves to build rooms in the country. I think ANZ was also saying this lately that the growth over the next two years will very much be dictated by the lack of inventory on the ground. In terms of developing market stalls out of the traditional markets, Asia in particular, India, Japan, yes indeed there are provisions for marketing in those areas within this allocation. I have the undertaking from the honourable Minister for Finance that if the need arises they can always secure more funding into those non-traditional markets.

All in all, we are quite comfortable with the way we are tracking tourism right now, honourable Member.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There is an increase of \$5 million from last year.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, it is very welcomed. The \$30 million last year was used quite effectively, hence the way we are growing now. The advantage with tourism is the sense of partnership, that a \$35 million that we contribute as the Government is one-third of the overall marketing for the country; the airlines pitch in and the operators also.

For Fiji to be enjoying these kind of numbers is really is the 35 million three times over because of the partnership, that is, the normal structure, how you market in partnership with the operators. As you know, we have a big billboards in Time Square in New York. That is unheard of in the past, we even took eggs on CNN, it was never heard of in the past. It is because of the partnership that is there between the government, airlines and the operators. That is where we always make sure that we drive this partnership by committing sufficient allocation for tourism marketing.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Chairman, I really was trying to ask whether we actually concentrating on getting the non-traditional markets with more advertisements because there is a high yield that comes out of those non-traditional markets, but I think the honourable Minister has answered what I asked for.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask the honourable Minister on SEG 6 – South Pacific Tourism Organisation - Rent (\$142,000), what does that mean?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Chairman, South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO) made up of the 12 or 14 countries of the Pacific. We host them in Fiji, the office is here in Fiji and we are responsible for the rent. We are renting FNPF for them. In the same way that we host other regional bodies, we also host SPTO in Fiji.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 38 – Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation.

Question put.

Head 38 motion agreed to.

Head 40 – Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Floor is now open for comments, shall we begin with Programme 1-1?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 10 – Capital Grants: Fiji Roads Authority there is quite a substantiative drop here of around \$40 million, if I am correct, and I do realise that there is \$5 million set aside for rural roads with PWD later on in this Budget. Can the honourable Minister enlighten us on the reasoning behind the big drop in the capital grant for FRA?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Chairman, may I answer that? The decrease is essentially due the completion of some of the big capital projects including the loan funded Transport Infrastructure Investment Project which is likely to end in July 2025. We took that into account and looked at what FRA would be able to deliver, given that some of the work would also be done by the Public Works Department.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Another question, Sir. Request the honourable Minister to give us some details with your permission, Sir, the two projects under direct payments which is the Urban Water Supply and Wastewater Management Project by ADB for \$2.35 million and the Transport Infrastructure Investment Sector Project (TIISP) ADB, I think it is a new one, of \$12.84 by ADB and the World Bank, a component of \$14.1 million. Can you just give us a brief highlight on that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, that is a direct payment allocation in terms of \$2.35 million financed through the loan grant facility at ADB, handled directly by the Ministry of Finance to the contactors for the implementation of clean water programmes, in particular the completion of the Viria project and retention claims for the relevant contractors, Sinohydro Corporation and sub-contractors.

HON. J. USAMATE.- For Viria?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, for Viria.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- That is ADB \$12.8 million and World Bank - \$14.7 million. This is a direct payment allocation, financed through the loan grant facility at ADB, handled also by the Ministry of Finance directly to the contractors for the implementation of key roads and bridges. The \$12.8 million is to cater for the King's Road upgrade, and the design and investigation works for the identified 40 affected bridges around the country. This has been earmarked for replacement in the next financial year.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The continuation of the work around Viti Levu or is it for other areas?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is correct.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 10, Capital Grant: Water Authority of Fiji (\$135,820,924) Viria Project. We had some discussions on compensation. Honourable Minister, is the Government paying that?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, Mr. Chairman. There were some discussions on that in terms of the legality of it. Looking at the legality of it, the land in question is freehold, but what was in question was the compensation for the fisheries. That again is subject to the legal assessment, and the first assessment is that the fisheries compensation is applicable to foreshore.

There were other claims too regarding water royalty which is not in the current legal frameworks plus other issues which were based, I think, \$10 million was bended around, but the legal basis for that is not there. Of course, there were other issues regarding development which we are also including in our budget for the rural roads which is the development of the roads and the connection of water, which we have also discussed with them.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, so the sum which I just mentioned is basically only for the project, we are not talking about the other components which you have just mentioned?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What component?

HON. V. NATH.- Which I mentioned, the compensation. I am asking the honourable Minister.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He just said that there is no legal basis.

HON. V. NATH.- I am just asking, this amount which is written there \$135,820,924, that is basically the whole payment for the project? Is that right?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, that is for the total capital grant for the capital works for Water Authority of Fiji, for everything in the capital works programme.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question to the honourable Minister on direct payment. We have talked about Viria Water Project. Can the honourable Minister tell us the anticipated date by when this project will be completed, because people are waiting for this project to be completed and some relief in terms of getting water in their taps?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, the project is already on line. You would have, I suppose noticed from the public the improved water services, the pressure, et cetera from the Suva-Nausori corridor. But the major construction works have been completed; main gravity, line on November 2023 designed building operate issues 23 but at the moment the Water Authority of Fiji is looking at the commissioning certificates and the closure of the design and build phase after the contractors submitted various documents which are required. At the end of July, it is expected that we will 90 percent complete the WAF quarters, landscaping works and the rural works at the Waitolu Reservoir, the road works and the reinstatement of footpaths along the pipe route. The last part is the design and build phase contractor to submit the compliance documents which is expected at the end of this month.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 2-2.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Honourable Minister on SEG 4 - Repair and maintenance, hydrologically equipment (\$130,000). Two issues here that I just wanted to ask in terms of the MET. One of the most important things that we have now is in relation to floods. I am looking at this expenditure on repair and maintenance of hydrological equipment. It has a budget now of \$130,000 and is a reduction of \$20,000 from last year. My concern in this particular area is about the flood gauges because the biggest disaster that we have in this country in flood gauges, sometimes we have them but they are not sending information or the gauges are out of kilter or something like that. So, with all these equipment in place, will it make sure that all those flood gauges are up and running, not only working but transmitting information down to Nadi.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, that is for funding to procure the hydrological equipment including the spare parts which some will need to be procured from overseas which is \$100,000 and \$41,000 from local materials. So, this is envisaged to complete the project or the task which is identified there.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I just hope that all those flood gauges will be up in running and transmitting.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman with your permission in terms of the Radar Operational Expenses (\$15,000); the three radars that we have around the country. It decreased from \$7,000. This year there is a decrease of \$7,000. The reason for the decrease in that same SEG 4?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- This is to cater for the radar bi-annual servicing and cleaning. That was the amount used in the previous year, which is why the reduction.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The reduction is \$7,000 from last budget to this.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- But perhaps the reason because you have just changed that other radar, that is now fully complete, you have a new one.

My last question on SEG 9, Mr. Chairman, I think this is new, Disaster Recovery Infrastructure (\$190,000). I think this looks new to me. Can you just explain what it is all about?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- So, basically it is one of the components of the Disaster Recovery Plan with Meteorological Services, given the critical nature of its services and it is to do with the ITC, the backup services renewal of the main production services and the backup services. So, that is the \$190,000 which is allocated there and also the CIS093 system cut-off and handover. So, it is basically the IT backup for the whole six services systems. One of the main concerns from the Meteorological Services over the last 24 months.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3- 1?

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Programme 3-1(8) - Rural Roads with an allocation of \$5 million which is appreciated. My question, Sir, is, will this work be outsourced, or will this be carried out by the Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport?

Simply because looking at other activities, we have the Mechanical Unit, Building Unit, Electrical Unit, Joinery and Plumbing, Energy, but there is no unit where you have the Department of National Roads that has the heavy plant component that does this. The honourable Minister before taking up the job, has always been saying about getting rid of FRA and bringing back PWD.

How will this allocation be handled, given that we do not have the Department of National Roads with the necessary machines that are supposed to be purchased? As the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport had alluded to earlier in most of his speeches.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In the last Budget, we had allocated funds for the acquisition of machines and that is currently in progress but for this one, we are looking at various components regarding the Rural Roads. If we are not using those then we will also be utilising or outsourcing. In terms of whether we have allocated that?

Just roughly with Divisional Engineer Central Eastern - \$1.3 million, Divisional Engineer West - \$2.3 million, Divisional Engineer North - around \$1.5 million. So, this is distributed according to the need there and this has also been coordinated with FRA. So, whatever they are not covering, we will complement it with this. It is not only for roads but it is also foot-crossings, the drainage works and also initiating gravel stockpiles in key areas, those are the main components of that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is a general question to the honourable Minister for Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport, I have noted from the question that I had asked earlier on. It was a written question and we have got the response from the Ministry of Finance, that quite a number of projects were not completed, and it was all related to Public Works Department carrying out those works, simple things like walkways for CWM Hospital was not done and I am sure most of the Ministers sitting around the room cannot move forward. We just wanted to understand some of the difficulties you are facing in terms of setting up this Public Works Department, or you may have other strategies to move this work forward because when the work is not completed, it is not realised on the ground and the benefits are not accrued. So, just from that perspective. Thank you, honourable Minister.

HON. RO.F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, I think what needs to be clearly understood is the situation which we are in or were in, in terms of the resources both, human resources and equipment. In order to rebuild that, I think the equipment part is simple, it is just the human resources, as we understand the lack of skills in specific areas, particularly for operators' trade skills and that is one of the main challenges we are facing. Not only that, we have to build that up, so in this budget, we have included that in terms of human resources but will continue to build that up in order to cater for the increased demand from the Ministries.

One of the delays was that we were working at the human resources level which was geared towards what was there before. But as we increase the demand, we need to increase the work and this year, we have budgeted for an increase in project staff which will also cater for the increased work. For example, for the key institutions - CWMH, some of the Government Quarters and for the Department of Works, we have increased the budget for the Government Quarters, as mentioned in the various Divisions, and prioritised according to those which have really deteriorated.

We have started on some, but as we discussed, the resources are limited from the last budget, but with the increase with the PWD in terms of the upgrade and enhancement of Quarters, that will be included there - the increased number of Project staff. Thank you

HON. J. USAMATE.- Just in relation to the establishment of PWD, I am glad honourable Minister that when you were initially talking about this, you were talking about replacing FRA with PWD. I am glad that you have now seen the light and...

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I did not say that.

HON. J. USAMATE.- ... decided to keep FRA. But last year, we did have \$5 million for PWD. What exactly was it that we have achieved, because if you see the way you have structured it now, you have put \$5 million last year and this year, you are putting aside \$5million, plus \$6 million to actually do work.

From what you are saying so far, it looks like that \$5 million that you had last year did not really put in your place to get PWD going. The \$11 million this year looks to be \$11 million to get things done for the \$5 million that you had last year has put you in a stage to get PWD doing things, because this \$11 million instigate is about getting things done. So, did that \$5 million put you into that space to start moving things forward or is it still delaying or is it still in the preparatory phase to develop PWD? Where are we?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- No, the \$5 million last year some have been expended and committed.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Not all?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Oh, very poor.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Because we had some issues again, as mentioned, regarding the tenders, et cetera, and of course the capacity within, which we have rectified in terms of the capacity. We have mentioned project management, tenders, accessing tenders those technical side. We have procured and I think some equipment have arrived.

For this additional \$6 million here, this includes the various the upgrading of Quarters not only that but even the facilities under the Ministry. We are looking at Kadavu, Tuvuca, Rotuma, some of the Quarters, the Boiler Shops, the Divisional Engineers Workshops, so these all needs to be brought up to par because they have not been operational for some time. With this budget, we will run definitely and with the Projects staff which have been included to really get into the business of addressing the deteriorated properties, including staff quarters in Divisions.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, I have noticed you have talked about the shortage of skilled workers and I totally agree with you. I am just thinking - one of the greatest sources of skill tradespeople in this country in the past used to be from PWD through the Apprenticeship Scheme. Is that something you are considering, although you get the fruits of it in three, four and five years time?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes, that is included in the budget but not really on a wide scale because they need to come in under Supervisors. So, we need to build them in phases, have the experience and qualified staff there and the apprentices need to come under those, then we move forward.

We can include them as part of the Project staff. I do not want to say labour but as part of the learning environment. I just want to say that I never said that we will throw out FRA. I said that we will move forward in a responsible and careful manner so that nothing is duplicated but in a complementary manner. *Vinaka*.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 3-3.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, through you, honourable Minister, in relation to SEG 8 – Extension of Grid Power – Rotuma and Lakeba Government Power Stations (\$960,000), can you just elaborate a bit on that? The other question is, why is Kadavu not included?

The reason I ask is because the capacity of these generators is such is to get the maximum out of it, you need more customers online. So, it is just the phases, you start with Lakeba and Rotuma first, then Kadavu later because they are the three major stations that we have, apart from Nabouwalu.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, \$960,000, honourable Member, is allocated as you quite rightly pointed out for Rotuma and Lakeba. Lakeba is to extend the grid from Bau Village to Waciwaci Village to Waitabu Village for a distance of about 5 kilometers, connecting about 115 households who are maintaining the existing 313 customers. Rotuma will connect about 80,000 households, while maintaining existing 1,198 customers, so that is the allocation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Are there any plans for Kadavu?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Next year.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Member, Kadavu is not mentioned in this. Programme 4-1.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, my question is on SEG 10 – Housewiring for Completed Grid Extension Projects (\$2 million). Again, \$2 million is given this year. Last year, \$2 million was given and this money was not used at all. So, if the honourable Minister can tell us what kind of hurdles he faced and why that project was not completed? What guarantee is there that we are all going to support and this \$2 million will be able to complete this?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If I can, \$1.6 million was utilised for the 2023-2024 Budget. So far, that is the latest that I am giving you. Sir, \$2 million is, of course, provided for the ongoing wiring contracts, and the project houses have been identified. Just to give you comfort, I think the Ministry is much better prepared now for the execution of the next budget.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Chairman, for the decrease, there are two components of that - the decrease in budget consideration for EFL Rural Grid Extension. This project consists of the rural grid extension and house wiring where the grant is transferred to EFL to implement these projects.

The Ministry has recently released \$4.1 million allocation for the 2023-2024 Financial Year. This can enable the EFL to complete the pending grid extension and house wiring. This will further increase the grant disbursed to EFL. So, the utilisation rate of the \$16 million provided from the past year, is around 70 percent to-date which has assisted 1,545 villages and rural settlements. But the crux of the matter is that the implementation or the rollout has been a problem. So, that is why we did not allocate for the funds because the funds are already there, and we need to utilise that this year.

Mr. Chairman, some of the challenges include the limited number of companies that are able to do this work because these are outsourced. It is very technical work and they also face serious staffing issues - retention of staff, et cetera.

The other one is the sourcing of materials regarding this work from overseas and the increased cost. I think there was an issue with some of the suppliers. Of course, we will need to work with EFL on how to improve the implementation and whether the fund should be sitting there in the Department of Energy, which is something that we will need to discuss, given the ongoing challenges in rolling this out.

Also included in that was the Climate Change Resilient Renewable Energy Development Project in Taveuni where \$350,000 had been allocated before but this is nearing completion. I think it is ready for commissioning.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, just a question on house wiring. There may be some other projects but there is a project with the Department of Energy that assists communities living in informal settlements in getting their house connected to electricity - wiring et cetera.

I know of a community just residing at the back of Caubati Road, that is Cunningham Road. The electricity is there and the line is there, but that community is not able to access electricity. I contacted the Director of Energy, he sent someone over to that community, but nothing has really progressed. So, I feel that the functions, et cetera, of the Department of Energy needs to be relooked at and how we can make them more responsible for some of the projects which the Government tries to deliver to the public.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- As I have mentioned, we will need to, at some point in time, decide whether we complement the private sector with the technical people within the Government

who can roll it out, or are we going to keep on relying on the private sector, given these challenges. So, that is where the human resource plan comes in, in terms of apprentices and all that kind of HR planning which needs to come into play. It is not an overnight thing, it is something that we need to plan properly for.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 8 - Replacement of Muana Hydro Turbine (\$356,522) and the Upgrade of Buca Hydro and Tiliva Solar Micro Grid (173,913). I thank the Government for this, knowing that Buca Hydro is initially a Turkish Government assistance and, of course, the one in Muana has been a lot of problems for quite a long time as well. My question to the honourable Minister is, with this upgrade, I am not sure about Muana whether that will mean extending to a few nearby villages within the Natewa area but, of course, in Buca initially when it was commissioned we were told that the source is sufficient with the right to supply energy to the nearby villages as well apart from Buca alone. So, you have Loa, Tukavesi, I know the honourable Minister for Lands has forgotten Loa. This upgrade means extending to these nearby villages.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Just brief on those two the replacement of Muana Hydro Plant. This was damaged in February 2024 details of the components, bearing casing was burnt given the high speed rotations, broken pool, et cetera. The experts in Renewable Energy Solutions have provided an estimate of the works which is around \$409,000. This will progress that. In terms of the grid from that and the extent of the coverage, I do not have those details but I can provide it later.

In Buca, the \$173,000, Fiji Government and ADBF signed an agreement for funding support from the Japan fund for prosperous and resilience Asia and the Pacific for the rehabilitation of Buca Hydro Plant and Tiliva Solar Micro Grid. So, total funding of \$3.4 million where the Japanese organisation will contribute US\$3 million and Fiji Government the amount stated there. As I mentioned, it is something that we need to implement. It is funded there. There are agreements in place and we need to move forward on that. So, the coverage again, I can advise later as I get the detail.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 10 - Housewiring for Completed Grid Extension.

Are the villages in Ra and Tailevu North also included in this housewiring grid extension villages like Sawanivo Village, Namara Village, Rokovuaka Village and Colata Settlement in Wainibuka. Can the honourable Minister give a clarification on that, please?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I will provide that to him, I do not have the full list with me.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- He has been raising this for quite some time.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I have to search from the long list which is here but I will share it with you.

HON. T.R. MATASAWALEVU.- I hope it is there.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Also, honourable Bulitavu is telling me to include him.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, in relation to SEG 8, I just go back a bit. Last year we had \$50,000 for Kadavu koro but I went there this year and it is still not working. Just for your information, honourable Minister, that is a hydro in Kadavu koro.

For the replacement of Muana Hydro, that hydro was working. The problem was negligence by the people that run it. So, hopefully as part of this, we will make sure that we address that particular issue. In Buca, is this about fixing the hydro or road access to fix it before you can start fixing the turbines. The money that is set aside.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It is the rehabilitation of the hydro plant and the micro-grid.

HON. J. USAMATE.- And the access road.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I will have to confirm that. I do not have that details.

HON. J. USAMATE.- On the Solar Hybrid Rehabilitation LAKARO. LAKARO stands for Lakeba, Kadavu and Rotuma; all the solars are not working. So, this LAKARO is it for all three or is it just for one of them.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- This funding is to cover all three which is under that one project with the UAE and we have discussed with them regarding the rehabilitation of this and this funding is for that. We have had issues with this, with the contractor who put that up, so it is something we need to really decide but it is really for the rehabilitation of those three.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, with this rehabilitation, they will be running by the end of next year?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I cannot give any assurance on that. That is what we are hoping for.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 6, Activity 1.

HON. N.T. TUINACEVA.- Mr. Chairman, I noted that there is an increase in the LTA Capital Grant by almost \$6 million and I am thankful to Government for that. That it is going to boost our road or safety activities. Honourable Minister, can you just clarify on this increase in terms of the projects to be undertaken that is covered in the \$10 million capital grant for this year please?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- For the LTA Capital Budget, the main components would be the LTA integrated IT system - \$3.5 billion. This is an ongoing project which also involves the re-engineering of the business processes from the start right up to the completion, the seamless type of operations. To streamline all that. The other one was the Labasa LTA Office, \$1.5 million so that we can have a fully-fledged office there with weigh-bridge, et cetera. I think a few years ago one of the Ministers planted a coconut tree there to commission the new office, so the coconut tree is now bearing a lot of fruits.

The \$2.7 million Supply and Implementation of Hyper Converge Infrastructure with Backup Solution, do not ask me about this, I am not really an IT person. It is to create a robust, scaleable, secure infrastructure that will ensure business continuity and data integrity and security. I think those are the main ones, the other one, a \$1 million is for installation of red lights speed camera and back office soft hardware. Also, it can increase revenue and instantly transfer TINs to an automated system and Portable Speed Camera - \$1 million.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, just to provide some colour to the explanation by the honourable Minister. Basically, what LTA is doing will actually transform the whole operations of LTA because they are going through a comprehensive, firstly review of the existing processes and then they will overlay it with an actual ITC system that automates a lot of the

processes. So, potentially, I suspect what will happen is, all the queuing that happens in LTA will be a thing of the past, that is the whole objective. They can pay online, renew licenses online all those things will come to bear. We all know it takes us a day to go and renew our registration, so hopefully that will be gone.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Programme 7.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, on SEG 5, I am still on Transport Activity 1, I have been given permission.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- I did not hear him give permission.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Okay, we are reaching that stage now.

Honourable Nath, you say this, this. You what, you are flipping out now?

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Chairman, I did indicate with Madam, I had one question for Programme 6-1(6) which is a valid question, that is, the Shipping Services Subsidy from Vatulele and Beqa. I do remember a few years ago with the Department of Transport...

HON. C.J. SINGH.- Which Programme?

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Programme 6-1.

HON. V. NATH.- He has given me permission.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- No, no, no.

I was wondering whether you were keeping in line with where we are up to?

HON. V. NATH.- No really, Sir.

Sir, I am on Programme 6-1(6) – Shipping Services Subsidy. Thank you for giving me permission, Mr. Chairman. Just one question to the honourable Minister, I do remember a few years ago, the Department of Transport did a household survey and a passenger movement survey for Vatulele and Beqa to Suva. Is this programme included honourable Minister?

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- The Shipping Services Subsidy (\$3.4 million). I wanted to explain the whole thing, but what was the question again.

HON. V. NATH.- Vatulele, Beqa, Suva.

HON. RO. F.Q. TUISAWAU.- It covers 174 trips annually across 10 specific routes. The breakdown of the allocation includes varying amounts for each ranging from 5,812 for Beqa, Vatulele and Yanuca.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Parliament will now vote on Head 40 – Ministry of Public Works, Meteorological Services and Transport. .

Question put.

Head 40 agreed to.

Head 50 – Miscellaneous Services.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- The floor is now open for comments. SEG1?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, I have seen that the salary contingency has increased from \$1.5 million to \$5 million. Can the Minister explain the change?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Essentially, as the name suggests, this Contingency Funding is set aside to meet any unbudgeted salary commitment that may arise during the year. Sometimes it is a result of a Job Evaluation Exercise and sometimes shortfalls in the budget that needs to be corrected for ministries and departments. We had a similar allocation in 2023 – 2024 Budget, so there was no utilisation. Given that we had 5,000 civil servants already receiving a salary increase and the remaining will be paid from this Financial Year (1st August) so if there is any mismatch somewhere, we can just fund it. That is why we increased by \$3.5 million.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 3?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I have a question on SEG 3(3) on Official Overseas Travel Cost. Just a question whether this is the only cost or some amounts are also in different ministries for their ministerial travel?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is a pool allocation which caters for air fare cost and per diem allowances for Ministers and Assistant Ministers travelling abroad for official duties.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- My question is not answered. Is this the only amount or travel is also included in each Ministry head?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There is travel in ministry head but for overseas travel, it is from Head 50.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Why I am asking because I recall asking this question to the honourable Minister for Education when the travel vote increased by \$450,000 and he also said that it was for the overseas visits by the honourable Minister as well as by the officials. So, I just wanted that clarification.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is overseas travel for Ministers.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 5.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, SEG 5(5) and (6) Public Service Broadcast (TV) and Public Service Broadcast (Radio). Is the Government continuing to engage FBC on this or any other service providers?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, the idea for us as a Government is that we want to create a level playing field and part of the reason why it is in Head 50 is that we are going to take a decision on a policy where we can use other broadcasters as well, based on our need and the cost that would be determined as part of proper tender and expressions of interest.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- SEG 6.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, a question on number 6 - Grant to Professional Bodies. There is grants to the Fiji Indigenous Business Council, Fiji Architects Association and Fiji

Institute of Chartered Accountants. Is this based on application or is this based on some sort of plan by Government of whom to assist?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is based on submissions by these professional bodies and we have considered this carefully. We feel that the Indigenous Business Council, for example, was defunct for many years and they have regrouped, had a very successful conference where the honourable Prime Ministers and all the Deputy Prime Ministers, Ministers were there. We really wanted to support the secretariat, grant to professional bodies such as Fiji Architects Association again was defunct. They do, as a professional body contribute towards a lot of the activities that the Government wants to do in terms of improving legislations, policies and so we felt that we should provide this additional funding to them. Fiji Institute of Chartered Accountants in the past have been helping governments to go a lot of things, so we considered that and that is why that allocation is there, based on their submission.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG 6(2) – Provision of banking services for non-economical rural areas (\$700,000) is allocated for that. I am just wondering which banks are receiving or will receive, how is this money given out to the banks and which banks were given money last year?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So, really this allocation, honourable Kumar is for subsidy to the Bank of the South Pacific for the provision of rural banking services, and BSP has been in partnership with Post Fiji. Essentially it ensures the rural communities have access to banking services. The Government pays a subsidy of \$3.52 on every transaction that is processed by BSP, by Post Offices and postal agencies, including electronic withdrawals and deposits. So, with the new tender, the price may change and other service providers may come on board with effect from 1st October, 2024, depending on what the tender Board decides.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you for your response, honourable Minister. Mr. Chairman, a bit of a concern, considering the banks that we have in our country and the amount of profits they are making with just less than a million people in this country, it is exorbitant and we do expect some level of social responsibility from the banks as well. I just wanted to make this comment. Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, I think you have a point and we have said to the banks, for example, the banks wanted to move very quickly on phasing out cheques, we have said that they should hold on to it, and they have agreed.

As I announced in the Budget Address, for the first time, people like yourselves in the past as Consumer Council Head, have been calling for the appointment of a Banking Ombudsman and that is something we, as a Government, are going to do.

So, on average, just to go back on this, 200,000 transactions are processed, including about 99 percent for electronic transactions and 1 percent manual transactions for our rural communities. It is an important service, but you are right, the banks ought to have some social responsibility as well in delivering some of these.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, on SEG 7, Activity 9 - Fiji Cyclone Recovery Programme (DFAT) (\$15,000,000), there was a similar allocation last year, but more than this, it was \$30 million. I also noted very lately that honourable Minister and the honourable Minister for Education were part of the ceremony on a new social infrastructure programme. My question is, whether this \$15 million is a separate allocation from the new social infrastructure programme? If it is a cyclone recovery allocation, is it meant as a sort of stand by for future cyclones, or is it for TC

Yasa recovery and rehabilitation that is also continuing, particularly in the schools in Vanua Levu? If the honourable Minister can clarify, please?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are right, honourable Leader of the Opposition, recovery means recovery after cyclone. This is direct funding agreement with the Australian Government which is fully funded. Through this arrangement, the Australian Government has provided AU\$37.38 million, which is equivalent to about FJ\$57 million for the programme, through which, a sum of \$52.54 million has been received in RBF Consolidated Fund Account. So, the programme actually includes the rehabilitation of nine schools namely:

- (1) Lekutu Secondary School;
- (2) Lekutu District School;
- (3) Nukubolu Primary School;
- (4) Maramarua District School;
- (5) Dreketi District School;
- (6) Bua District School;
- (7) Dama District School;
- (8) Wailevu West District School;
- (9) Ratu Luke Memorial School; and
- (10) two health facilities, namely, Taveuni and Kadavu.

So, to date, seven of the nine schools have been completed with the final two schools, both Lekutu Primary and Secondary Schools, is due to be finished probably by the end of this month.

The next phase of the programme is delivering infrastructure upgrades at Taveuni Hospital and Kadavu Hospital. That is the description of the projects so far.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, a supplementary question, please. I know that Nukubolu was not initially in the list, but they approached. When we went through the list of schools, if I may just say, Sir, that Muanidevo Primary School had their two school blocks destroyed, but it was not in that list as well. There were discussions between the AMU of the Ministry of Education. If there is funding, if Muanidevo School can be considered?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think people have already got there so Muanidevo Primary School would be included.

Mr. Chairman, Nukubolu, I was there at the opening of the facilities, it is a fantastic facility. The people were really grateful that they now have all new classrooms and all other facilities including washrooms, et cetera. This has been a very good project, very well received by schools and communities around those areas.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Chairman, Public Private Partnership for Health - \$90 million. I suppose this is the payment to ASPEN.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Yes.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you. So, during the Budget Speech the honourable Minister said that Government is paying \$10 million per month. So, there is \$30 million less.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are right, as I have said very clearly and that is why I spent a bit of time in the Budget Speech to put on record what happened with respect to the Public Private Partnership. When the hospital both, Ba and Lautoka Hospitals were handed before the

conditions, were met by the concessionaire. So, the cost was never a factor in the handing over of the Hospitals.

What we have found is that the cost just escalated, the services have escalated and the estimate now is about \$10 million per month. On a positive note, we have already started negotiations with the help of IFC, FNPF which was forced into the project under HCF which is the company that manages, in which FNPF has 80 percent share and ASPEN Medical which run the hospital has 20 percent. We are hoping that in the next three months to six months, we will have a new agreement and we are expecting the cost to come down. So, that is the expectation in terms of the allocation.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, we move on. SEG 10?

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, SEG 10 - Northern Division Projects, can you elaborate on that, please.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There are quite a few items so let me just go to it. You are going very fast, honourable Lal.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Your horse is too fast.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am coming to that. You went right to the end. So, that is \$1.9 million and, Mr. Chairman, Sir, can we go on to the rest and I will come back to answer honourable Ketan Lal's question. In the meantime, you can go on with your second question.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, Activity 4 – Graduate Business Start Up Grant - \$300,000. Can you elaborate on that, please?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is a new allocation and it will be distributed through the FCEF and students who come out from universities in their final year would be able to apply for this \$10,000 grant to be able to start.

The Northern Development Programme is actually FDB subsidy for projects there.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, on the Graduate Business Start Up Grant again, so this will apply to current students who are in the university or it can go back to the previous years as well?. Just like how the TELS was wiped out?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is for new graduates, those coming out of the university. The idea is that they can choose whether they want to go into employment or they could go straight into a business enterprise and become self-employed and do other things. And \$300,000 will be distributed through the TELS programme.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Chairman, Sir, my question is on SEG10 - Item 4 and I have two questions related to this. The first question is on Merit Based Skills Qualification. What is the rationale for increasing the budget from \$5.4 million to \$7 million when only \$3.3 million was utilised in the last 11 months?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The expectation is that some of the new students, for example, before, those who paid themselves to do Foundation Studies at universities privately, were not eligible for scholarships. So, we are still not funding Foundation because we do not want people to just go to universities and universities would try and attract them, but if they finish Foundation by paying themselves they would be eligible for TELS scholarships as well.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- So, honourable Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Planning and Development, you still have not answered my question. You are just anticipating that the number will go up.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- But my concern is the amount that was allocated was not used.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is true, so the assessment that TELS does is that, “Alright, we are allocating this much for this many students in this particular category”, but every year, and it has happened in the past even with loan schemes where you have certain allocations but not all of it is used if the students choose to go into something else.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes, I do not agree with you but I will go along with that. Why I do not agree with you, normally, when you do your budgeting if someone is not using the money, you try and reduce as we have heard from other Ministers, but here, utilisation is low but still the money is allocated.

Now, my second question is on the Hardship Assistance allocation which is \$7.7 million for the next financial year. Again, it was not used at all in the last 11 months, and we can see that \$5.9 million is allocated. If you can explain to us, what could have been the reasons that this money was not used?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You can see that there is a decrease in the allocation from last year. It is possible that a lot of students who had already been in the programme continued with the programme, paying themselves without utilising the Hardship allocation. This scheme really is to assist private students doing degree programmes, from second year onwards, with an academic achievement of about 65 percent GPA. Obviously, they will be bonded and students who do not have a combined parental income and business network of more than \$100,000 unless allowed by means testing, so the scheme is expected to assist filling in gaps in the labour market.

The scheme will have about 2,600 awards and 250 is, kind of, ring-fenced for MBBS because sometimes students meet the mark criteria and because the number allocated for MBBS, because of the capacity in the institution themselves, they are not able to get so. You come from the top then there is a cut-off mark, but some also get an entry; although they do not get a scholarship. And they go pay themselves, and then second year they can apply for that.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, honourable Minister, I understood the bit you have said but my question was simply on the basis that this money was not utilised and yet, substantial amount has been allocated. That is all.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You can argue until the crows come home about why we are allocating this. It is not like in other Ministries where you see the capacity, if they are not utilised, but this is the allocation based on the number of students who would come out of Form 7, Form 6, who would go into foundation and if you do not allocate it, if you do not use it, then it is alright, but the allocation is there if these students come up, so it is a budget.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Chairman, SEG-10 on item 10 as well just on the Nadi River Flood Alleviation Project. I am sorry, honourable Minister, I missed this last year in the budget discussion. There was an allocation of \$3 million and you have another allocation of \$1 million. My simple question is this the continuation of the flood alleviation which involves the construction of retention dams in the tributaries that is in Nadi or are we using this as part of our contribution in the

work that JICA is also looking at in terms of the Nadi River Realignment. I just wanted clarification on that, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, honourable Leader of the Opposition, you are right, it is part of that big project - the Nadi River Basin Project. It has not moved too much over the years. The Australian Government and the Japanese Government are now pushing ahead, despite some delays and we are funding that effort through a renewed mix of funding commitments from the Japanese and the Australian Governments, along with \$5 million Government funding. Discussions will also be held with the World Bank to gauge their interest in the project funding. So, flood mitigation in the Nadi River Basin is really essential to the tourism sector and this is something that has been there for many years. The proposed structural measures are to provide protection to the Nadi River Basin area against one in a fifty-year flood event kind of thinking. The Ministry of Finance will be working closely with all stakeholders to finalise the components and solutions for Part B of the Nadi River Project. This allocation is really to provide Government the resources and the ability to move ahead with negotiations and get the project going.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Chairman, SEG 10 No. 4 – Apprenticeship - \$1 million. What is that thing for? It is for wages or fees and how do employers access that money?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- There will be a number of components with the Apprenticeship Programme. Essentially as you said earlier in your contribution that to revamp and incentivise the whole Apprenticeship Scheme, we are going to allocate 400 awards to pay 50 percent tuition fees or add \$2 an hour as a top-up to the Minimum Wage rate paid by employers under the scheme.

The number of awards in this financial year has been increased from 400 to 500 given more interest for employers and students. This is a very targeted attempt towards our unemployed youths, adults, early school leavers, those who fall by the side, for 150 hours to 160 hours of competency-based training after which they can obtain some form of employment. Again, TELS will pay 50 percent of the tuition fees to encourage employers to pay the Apprenticeship students attractive wages, to offset expenses or add \$2 an hour to their Apprenticeship wages.

Again, in addition to that, there will be a phase out of industrial attachment allowance. This scheme was for providing allowance of \$100 per month for maximum of six months for students. We are either doing industrial attachments or clinical attachments. Majority in the attachment are now part of the programme and essentially coded uni such as students who receive the normal allowance except for a few programmes which require books to be filled for eligible graduation. So, a sum of \$330,000 has been utilised in the current year as of 11th July. People are beginning to understand the Apprenticeship Scheme again. There is much more knowledge and advocacy now from the employers themselves or the value of this programme and Government is putting or playing its part by including this as part of our scholarship programme.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on Head 50 – Miscellaneous Service.

Question put.

Head 50 agreed to.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, please take note that Heads 51 and 52 are Standing Appropriations or below the line Appropriation. Head 51 lists all the pensions that are payable and these are a charged on the Government finances. Head 52 are the charges on accounts

of public debt. These numerous pages list all the information on the interest and loans. Neither Head is voted upon because they must be paid and are therefore already catered for.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the Estimates and we shall now proceed to considering the Schedules and Clauses of the 2024 – 2025 Appropriation Bill 2024 which is Bill No 7 of 2024 as required by Standing Order 101. I advise honourable Members that we have not amended the Estimates and Standing Order 101 prevents any amendments being moved and made at this stage. Standing Orders 101(3) also prevents any debate on these questions. I hope you each have a copy of the Bill.

Schedule 1

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Schedule 1 stands part of the Bill.

Schedule 2

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Schedule 2 stands part of the Bill.

Clause 1

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 1 stands part of the Bill.

Clause 2

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 2 stands part of the Bill.

Clause 3

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 3 stands part of the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members that bring us to end of the Committee of Supply and we have now concluded voting on Heads 1 to 50 and as well as Schedules and Clauses of the 2024 -2025 Appropriation Bill 2024 (Bill No 7 of 2024) and therefore I will now resume the Speaker's Chair.

The House resumed:

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Committee of Supply has agreed to the 2024-2025 Appropriation Bill 2024 without amendments.

In that respect, I now call upon the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to move the Third Reading of the Appropriation Bill.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the 2024-2025 Appropriation Bill 2024 (Bill No. 7 of 2024) be read a third time and be passed.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	39
Nays	-	11
Abstain	-	2

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to appropriate the sum of Three Billion, Nine Hundred Fifty-Five Million, Eight Hundred Nineteen Thousand, Four Hundred Seventy-Nine Dollars for the ordinary services of Government for the year ending 31st July, 2025 (Bill No. 7 of 2024) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2024)]

(Acclamation)

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament has now passed the 2024-2025 National Budget as I had alluded to earlier.

Honourable Members, the week-long Budget process is essential and vital for Parliament to fulfil its constitutional obligation. On that note, I take this opportunity to thank all honourable Members for your contributions during this integral process.

I also congratulate the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics on the successful passing of the 2024-2025 National Budget.

Honourable Members, that bring us to the end of the sitting today. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.40 p.m.